

Active Learning Workshop Reflection

Title of the workshop: Active Learning

Purpose statement: Define active learning, compare and contrast active v.s. passive learning, practice and evaluate a variety of active learning techniques, identify ways to establish a classroom environment that supports active learning, and discuss the benefits and challenges of active learning.

Lead presenter: Barbi Honeycutt

Date: 11/09/09

Location: Research Building III

Number of people attending the workshop: ~20

Reflection (e.g. what you've taken from the workshop, how you will incorporate what you've learned in your teaching, how you feel your teaching can be improved given information shared in the workshop, etc.):

Barbi started the workshop with some active learning activities to get everyone focused on active learning. We were really immersed in actively learning, which was great because after you learn something actively you can really take away the benefits of learning this way. After this little activity, Barbi sat us down and asked for feedback. The interesting thing was that most people observed different things than what I focused on. Hearing everyone else's observations helped me better understand active learning and how it helps others in ways different than how it helps me.

Using active learning is not an easy task. For one, you need material that lends itself to being actively learned. Another hurdle is that the teacher needs to be creative enough to implement active learning in a way that will encourage interaction as opposed to turning students away from the material. One key to this making sure you understand your students. If your students are more standoffish then active learning may not be the best strategy because forced interaction in the class would turn students away from the material. So before thinking of whether or not to use active learning, knowing your students should be your first priority.

One of the best handouts that Barbi gave was one that listed roughly 25 active learning strategies that one could apply to their lecture. Each strategy lays out a basic outline of what you do, the only task is finding the material that fits within the outline. So it is really helpful to be able to look at an outline and then match material to it as opposed to looking at the material and trying to come up with your own outline of an active learning strategy. Certainly I will run across material that just doesn't lend itself to active learning or a group of students that do not respond well to active learning, but there will also be times that active learning is the best strategy for both me and my students.

Applying active learning techniques to my courses has been a difficult process for me. My personality is not one to have students play games. The material in economics that I teach does not lend itself to have students discuss the issue amongst them in order to learn. The strategy for active learning that I have found to be the most effective is to use the Socratic Method and ask directed questions to the students so that they can learn through answering the questions. This has been a process for me that takes an immense amount of practice in order to ask the right questions to illicit responses. I have found myself rephrasing questions multiple times in order to get a student to understand my point, however once the student understands why I am asking the questions it is a rewarding experience. A student will retain information that they have accumulated better than information that is dictated to them. By forcing a student to answer a question in order to understand a topic, I am ensuring that the student has a higher chance of retaining, and later on using, that information.