

WHAT IS MEANT BY "ACTIVE LEARNING?"

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Active learning is operationally defined and is differentiated from passive learning. Positive reasons why active learning is desired are offered and negative outcomes for non active learning are discussed. Active learning is promoted.

The term: "active learning" is frequently read in education journal articles, heard in education speeches, and presented to educators at school meetings. Just what does this term mean? Often, terms are best understood when we are told what they do not mean: a definition by negation. Active learning is the opposite of passive learning. The passive student is dependent on a teacher to impart what is to be learned. Passive learning requires little student personal involvement or overt work and it is not self reinforcing. Passive learning tends to get dull very quickly. Passive students are or soon tend to become disinterested, non-motivated and responsive, and ineffectual learners. That which is learned passively is typically not well retained and is commonly not effectively or enthusiastically applied.

The active learner, on the other hand, is not overly dependent on a teacher; active learning makes the student a partner in the learning process. Active learners commonly use their teachers as resource people, as guides to the learning process, and as motivators for further endeavors. Active learning, as the term implies, is a process where the learner takes a dynamic and energetic role in one's own

education. Due to the learner's participation, such learning is self reinforcing. Such reinforcement adds to the retentive qualities of what is learned. Active learning usually is enjoyable, motivational, and effective in getting life's tasks done. Active learning tends to boost learner egos where passive learning does little for learners except to raise frustration. Active learning typically stimulates pride, increases confidence, imparts credibility in the eyes of their teachers and aware classmates as well as parents, stimulates a thirst for broader and deeper understanding in future academic endeavors, and tends to make learning more fun and personally satisfying.

An active learner can be observed frequently performing the following behaviors:

1. Asking questions of clarification, example, category, nomenclature, status, reason, rationale, and kind. Such questions are to enhance learning, not to insult, intimidate, or embarrass anyone. Quality questions tend to elicit good answers and stimulate yet further learning.
2. Challenging ideas, procedures, content relationships, priorities without attack-

ing people or their character. Such challenge civility allows continuing intellectual and social dialogue.

3. Following up learning sessions with personal extensions such as: added reading, group discussions about what was learned, experimentation, and applications of learning. Such follow up validates learner interest in what was learned.
4. Connecting what was most recently learned with what was previously learned. These connections are best made through using what we learn. Application is vital to recall.
5. Attaching what is learned with skill development. Connecting knowledge and skill is an advanced learning dynamic.
6. Discussing what we know with others in order to validate our ability to clearly, thoroughly articulate what we think we know. Such discussions increase our credibility for others and raise our confidence as well.
7. Keeping an enthusiastic attitude about learning. Such passion for learning commonly stimulates others around you to increase their interest. An interested learner invites collaboration.
8. Active learners are more often sought out by instructors, classmates, and persons outside school for opinions, assistance, and insight than are their passive counterparts.
9. Active learners typically exchange views, share research findings, and debate topics among themselves. Such exchanges add measurably to what is learned.
10. Active learners usually have an open mind, make fewer snap judgments, and possess better reasoning skills.

These are not exhaustive behaviors that signal an active learner; however, they are among the most frequent and telling signs we can readily observe. A passive learner can be observed frequently performing the following behaviors:

1. Learning comes hard and slow; diminished motivation and enthusiasm inhibits spontaneous learning.
2. Transference of what is learned is minimal. Since enthusiasm for learning is low, looking for connections wanes.
3. Retention of what is learned is stunted. Passive learners often fail to or refuse to see any relationship to learning in class and later life expectancies or demands.
4. Passive learners typically do not ask probing, challenging, or extending questions. Because their enthusiasm and attentiveness is low, their questions tend to be ones that show a lack of attention and retention.
5. Passive learners tend not to apply what they learn as adeptly as do active learners.

6. Passive learners, even though many are bright, tend to acquire a reputation as not so smart learners.
7. Passive learners are seldom sought out for their views or insights on what they know. Unfortunately, passivity carries with it assumptions by others of dullness and uncaring.
8. Passive learners infrequently, if at all, exchange views, share research findings, or debate topics among themselves.

Teachers have an easier and more successful task instructing active learners than they do with passive learners in part because the active learner tends to realize when presented material or readings are confusing or unusually difficult and therefore can and typically do ask relevant questions to promptly clear up confusion thus avoiding small problems from burgeoning into major difficulties. Passive learners often fail to recognize – or care about small barriers – until they become major barriers. Related to the previous statement, active learners are more likely to seek tutoring in classes presenting challenges whereas passive learners rarely do until matters fester badly. Active learners help instructors by providing relevant examples when appropriate, offer answers to questions and problems proffered by instructors thus adding to the dialogic flow of classroom work; whereas passive learners typically refuse such activity thus blunting dialog. Active learners tend to have work done on time, completely, and done neatly; passive learners often hand

in work late if at all, turn in incomplete effort, and do less neat work.

Active learners, for the most part, tend to be more creative and seem able or willing to draw material and insights from previous learning than do passive learners. Active learners are more likely to accept and adopt suggestions offered by instructors, tutors, and helpful classmates than are passive learners. The price of being a passive learner is that most of the time, effort, money, and sacrifice to learn is wasted as such learning is seldom retained, infrequently sharpened, and often is incomplete. Active learning is not a guarantee of success; but it does enhance one's chances of doing well. Active learners usually are able to solicit and obtain enthusiastic and quality recommendation statements from teachers for further education of employment opportunities. Passive learners have less likelihood of stellar recommendations from their teachers. Active learners are more likely than passive learners to heed advice from teachers to begin forming and nurturing a social and professional network as networking has been proven to be a long term asset to advancement. Active vs. passive learning behaviors and values learned in school or carried to school from previous experiences do not typically disappear when students enter the work force. Active behaviors and values commonly result in better opportunities for advancement and superior remuneration increases than do passive behaviors and values. Eager, cooperative, and social learners (typically active) are less likely to be let go than are reluctant, less cooperative, and less social learners (typically passive). Passive learn-

ers or employees can learn to change or adapt, but that process is usually painful. Passive students tend not to be popular; popularity is an important student dynamic. In high school, popularity helps for young people into future citizens, community members, employees, and advanced scholars. Active students have distinct advantages in these areas. Passive learners often get overly frustrated when first attempts fail and they sometimes quit. Active learners, on the other hand, often take initial obstacles as challenges to overcome and work these out.

Active learning is obviously the preferred mode; passive learning needs to be discouraged. Classroom instruction needs to include how to learn in addition to what to learn.

Teaching, rewarding, and promoting active learning, while largely a classroom activity and value, is not exclusively a school activity. Playground supervisors, parents and babysitters, and part-time student employers need to reinforce and extend the active learning paradigm. Active learning is easiest when started early, learned, in part, by good role modeling, accompanied by healthy rewards, and shown to be useful. Teachers, parents, and others working with students need competent instruction relevant to reinforcing, rewarding, and extending active learning behaviors and value and in recognizing passive learning symptoms.

More active learning students will enhance learning for all involved. They will produce superior employees and citizens as well. It is a goal that merits immediate action, research, and funding.

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