

ACTIVE LEARNING FRAMEWORK CONSULTATION FORM

The consultation is part of the Novigado project's O2 "Active Learning Reference Framework".

How should active learning look like in a school?

By Münevver Cesur, project coordinator and a teacher trainer at the Ministry of National Education, Directorate General for Teacher Training and Development

Learning can be described as a process of making meaning. It is the process of acquiring new understanding, knowledge, behaviours, skills, values, attitudes, and preferences. Experienced teachers facilitate these levels of understanding by providing active learning environments and more opportunities and interactions which encourage deeper learning in the schools. Instead of an ordinary discussion during the class, teachers add presenting findings as a group to other classroom friends, which is more active, or web 2.0 tools or videos, pictures or audio materials to their presentations to make the presentation more attractive and effective. That's how students co-construct knowledge with the teacher in some way. That could be a project homework, or a discussion in a group or sometimes a fishbowl activity. If the students are talking more to each other rather than listening to the teacher it is the proof of active learning in this school. Depending on the subject, teachers get students to develop new things, new activities, and even new things using real life situations. Students are expected to construct, build and perform.

Active learning is a teaching method used by the 21st century teachers who already know that students need high-order thinking skills such as analysis, synthesis and evaluation to keep up with the novelties in this era. In active learning, students are at the centre and engaged in learning. The term of "learning to learn" comes into prominence and active learning focuses on how students learn rather than just what students learn. Students are in the kitchen of learning with meaningful and scaffolded hands-on activities and they learn in a reflective and a thoughtful way, rather than simply being the passive recipients of information. Active learning refers to different teaching strategies ranging from experiential learning to project-based learning. Although strategies can differ, the aim is to engage students as active participants to their learning process. Students are not sitting only by listening to the teacher, but they are busy together with their classroom friends using structured activities and materials specifically designed for them to think hard, which helps them learn, apply, analyse, synthesize and summarize the information. In a way, it doesn't mean that the teacher totally should abandon the old-school lecturing format, instead, should add active learning strategies to make lectures more effective.

A school, whose focus point is student learning, tries to design its learning environments for students' getting higher-order thinking skills, which are Knowledge, Understanding, Application, Analysis, Synthesis, Evaluation. Research shows that students can remember %10 of what they read, % 20 of what they hear, % 30 of what they see, %50 of what they see and hear, %70 of what they say and write and %90 of what they do. In other words, it is not possible to transfer knowledge to students by simply telling them, rather, teachers need to challenge the students' thinking skills. In that process, students are encouraged to explore their own attitudes and values and try to get knowledge and grasp the information in response

to opportunities provided by the teacher. Moreover, researches have indicated that less instruction and more feedback is a winning formula for creating deeper learning in active school environments. If students need to make reflection and give feedback to others during the classroom, they have to think critically and respond. Besides, those students will feel responsible from the lesson's content so that they can give effective feedback to their peers. This allows learners to organize their ideas better. Students are challenged by involving as much as possible in their own learning and focusing learning rather than a teacher's teaching. At the end of an ordinary school day, important thing is what is in the students' head rather than what is in the teacher's head.

Choosing meaningful questions for meaningful activities is at the heart of what makes active learning effective as in Socratic style. Asking questions offering opportunities for meaningful thinking can be important, but understanding what the question is, is far more important than what the answer is. This is the milestone not only for deeper learning but also creativity and innovation. Creative process requires more time and collaboration in the school, because it requires exploring ideas and using imagination to generate possibilities. New methods, such as flipped classroom approach, allow enough time for teachers in the classroom to encourage learners to question or create collaborative environment. When learners have more time in the classroom to engage actively with the information, they perform better, because they will have more time to discuss, practice, review and apply. Applying active learning approaches in the schools help teachers to make their classes more inclusive, as it is generally accepted that active learning promotes learning for all students who have different learning styles. They have unique chance to have a personalized experience in the school, since they get interaction with their peers and teachers. Active learning is normally shared learning where progress is often the result of dialogue between the student and teacher, rather than as something that is given to the students on a plate.

In active learning approach, schools do not just apply a summative assessment, because they are aware of the importance of learning process. During learning process, a student is expected to develop autonomy and ability to learn, which is the first step of becoming a lifelong learner. If a learner succeeds to get self-autonomy on his learning and become a lifelong learner, that learner continues learning even after school and this is what all education systems intend to do. In order to apply formative assessment, lecturing style should change, as well. Instead of changing topics in a lesson to attract the attention of students every ten to twenty minutes, a different approach to learning should be changed each fifteen minutes. It changes the way students are engaged rather than changing topics. That's why a teacher needs to know and apply in his/her classroom various learning strategies such as Think – Pair – Share, Group Discussions, Case Studies, Triad Groups, Role-Playing, Jigsaw Activity, Forum Theatre and Experiential Learning. Learners may look at the same paper or book, but they are discussing questions given by the teacher or asked to analyse the information presented. They can use ICT to make presentation or search data to support their opinions. As a result, applying only one exam does not show the effort that a student gives throughout the class in a year.

What would you recommend to teachers?

When teachers start thinking about applying active learning strategies in the school or in their classrooms, they should focus on student learning rather than the activity itself. The most important thing is to put the student in the centre and prepare a task or activity that will help students to think critically. It can be a really simple one, because complex tasks do not always

help to develop the students' thinking skills as you have imagined. So, focusing on what students should learn or understand and shaping the task to activate their brain are the core elements here.

Next step is scaffolding the activities very carefully so that every step of the way is very clear to them. This facilitates independent, critical and creative thinking. It can be a project that they can use internet or other materials to find a good solution to the given problem on their own or as a group. Also, scaffolding helps them to figure out the given information better, since they will start learning from the easiest to more complex parts.

The other step for teachers is to help their students to build up the habit of reflection on their own learning and giving effective feedback. Making self-reflection requires having objective observation skills and most of the time having responsibility of their own learning process. Since students learn from their own mistakes and experiences of others, sharing and collaborative learning come onto the stage. Learning how to collaborate, how to share, how to take the experiences and mistakes of others are all about collaborative critical thinking. In other words, the teacher will kill two birds with one stone because it will also encourage effective collaborative group work thanks to reflection. If there are large classes in the school, small group discussions or peer-discussion activities can be used to develop communication skills and increase awareness of other students' learning as learning resources. Collecting feedback about the activities give teachers an invaluable chance to acquire necessary information about whether an activity worked, appropriate for the students' level, which parts can be adapted etc.

Another essential step for teachers to pace is that they should explain their style (active learning with different sample activities) and justification at the beginning of the year, especially if active learning is not a common concept in the school or discipline. Being consistent is the core element here, because establishing norms for students' participation encourage them to learn to be an active learner in time. Students like to get the habit of behaving the way the teacher depict at the beginning of the semester. Furthermore, if a teacher gives more responsibility to the students in the lesson, students are apt to see the lesson more valuable and related to their goals. So, like you have explained your style at the very beginning, you should give them the freedom of choosing the discussion topic of that day or applying one of the solutions that they choose and you will surprise how automatically their engagement levels will increase.

The teachers should also be active learners themselves and reflect about their lesson. Teachers should always remind themselves things to consider next time and use technology if it is necessary. If the classroom is buzzing with excitement, teachers wouldn't want to spend the majority of their time trying to get the technology working. Instead, here are some ways that encourage active learning in the classroom:

- Classroom Discussion
- Think – Pair – Share
- Gallery Walk
- Jigsaw Activity
- Peer Reviews
- Role – Plays
- Learning Cell
- Debates
- Collaborative Learning Groups
- Cooperative Learning Groups
- Problem Based Learning
- Case Studies
- Discovering Plate Boundaries
- Just in Time Teaching
- Flipped Learning
- Think Aloud

- Respond, React, Reply
- Round Tables
- Hot Seat
- Snowball
- Fishbowl
- The Pause Procedure
- Strip sequence
- Concept Map or Mind Maps
- Poster My Wall
- Hands on Technology
- Interactive Lecture
- Inquiry Learning
- Forum Theatre
- Minute Paper

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