

Professionals Against Improperly Labeling Active Learners

PAILAL Newsletter

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

This issue continues the drive to move educators away from a reliance on passive means of instruction to those practices where all learners are actively engaged in the construction of their knowledge. In keeping with the work of Argyris and Schön (1992), we know that some people cannot change their espoused theory or theory-in-use unless they can see or experience a better way for themselves. This article moves us closer to seeing that learning can be changed from passive to active by employing some creativity and a willingness to change our own thinking about learning.

Argyris, C., & Schön, D. A. (1992). *Theory in practice: Increasing professional effectiveness* (Reprint ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

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IN LEARNING: THE
END OF THE
DEATH-BY-
LECTURE SESSION 1-3



Did You Know?

"Learners of all ages prefer to learn in active environments."

—Timothy C. Clapper

AN IRONIC TWIST IN LEARNING: THE END OF THE DEATH-BY-LECTURE SESSION

BY TIMOTHY C. CLAPPER

While numerous educators are turning to learning theory and recognizing the importance for student-centered instruction, too many are still tied to the lecture as a primary means of instruction. Lecturing does have its time and place in the classroom, but for those that subscribe to a cognitive and constructivist conceptual framework for learning, lecturing can be viewed as somewhat of a passive activity. The speaker or presenter hopes that the learner is receiving the message that they are delivering and perhaps even assume that the learners are sharing the same exact thought process as the lecturer. Realistically, few of us have survived the long classroom lectures without moving into a daydream, and this can occur even with the most interesting subjects.

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Regardless of the content, learning is still very much dependent on the learner's intention to learn (Ormrod, 2003, p. 42). As Ormrod (2003) notes, attention is not a behavioral issue but a cognitive one and educators must understand that eyes and ears directed toward the material being covered is not enough; the learner's minds must also be engaged (p. 197).

As an educator, educational consultant, and medical simulation specialist, I have witnessed those with years of education and claims of possessing an espoused theory of experiential and active learning who cannot move away from the practice of the long, seemingly unending lectures. Curriculum vitas are filled with evidence of such practice and classrooms as training sessions continue to resort to this form of content delivery. Lectures can be made engaging and quite useful if they are conducted in accordance with a learner-centered, constructivist framework. How many do you know that are?

Shieh (2009) reports on the work performed by David Penrose, a course designer for SunGard Higher Education who developed something referred to as 'microlectures' for San Juan College. Penrose describes the use of lectures as providing key concepts and showing the learners where to look, and what to look for in the learning activities that they will become involved in. In essence, these microlectures are used to help the learner place themselves in the right mind by providing them with enough information to guide them to the objectives and through the learning experience. The time it takes for these microlectures might surprise some, as they are intended to last only 60 seconds to three minutes. While the microlectures have been designed for many of San Juan College's online classes, microlectures can be a powerful and welcoming addition to the active learning environment

"...many other activities can effectively replace the lecture in the learning environment."

In fact, many other activities can effectively replace the lecture in the learning environment. At the Institute for Medical Simulation and Advanced Learning (IMSAL), I developed a central venous catheter or central line placement course that opens with a K-W-L (what you Know, Want to know, and what have you Learned?) graphic organizer to help learners transfer in their knowledge of central line placement. This is followed by a cooperative learning session, more specifically the JIGSAW technique, which requires the learners (doctors in this case) to read through select evidenced-based topics related to central line complication, infection, and preferences, and then help others in their group with understanding the key concepts of their topics. This requires learners to become actively engaged with the information and also involves them in the reciprocal learning process where they have to immediately explain and apply the information in some way.

After working with this new information, the learners move through a demonstration of placing a central line catheter using a central line simulator or trainer, followed by hands on practice. All the while, learners operate in teams of two to three and use a pictorial version of the central line training checklist to assist and assess one another through this learning experience. A study is currently being organized to analyze the efficacy of the learners from this model of learning; but the comments and feedback appear very promising.

Additionally, a poster or positive graffiti session was added to a shoulder dystocia skills course developed for IMSAL which also replaces the lecture in this course. This



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session involves placing topics related to a serious labor and delivery situation, called shoulder dystocia, on blank posters around the room. Learners move through the posters in teams of two to three and transfer-in all they know about the topic, rotating from poster to poster in three minute intervals. This is followed by the learners reviewing topic sheets with evidenced-based information. Following this activity, the learners return to the posters and add this new found knowledge to the existing knowledge on the sheet. While at each poster, the learners may also correct or add to any knowledge that is present on the poster sheets.

The key to creating a good learning session is to make sure that what is being done leads to the course objectives and greater understanding. Moving away from long lectures and passive activities might be a challenge for some educators at first. However, if one is serious about making a difference in learning, effort needs to be made to understand how people learn best and how we can include activities that meet their active learning needs.

Ormrod, J. E. (2003). *Educational psychology (Custom Ed.)*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Shieh, D. (2009, Mar 6). These lectures are gone in 60 seconds. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 55(26), A1-A13. doi:1662777451.

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The views expressed in this article belong to the author and are not representative of any organization outside of PAILAL.



We hope that you enjoyed this newsletter. Sharing information and strategies can make a difference. There are so many great educators. They see in each learner the full potential of what can be.

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