

Involving Students in their Own Learning
CETL capstone
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As faculty, we can try active learning strategies in the classroom but if students are not prepared to engage in the learning process, all of our efforts may be futile. Reflecting back on this year and all the ideas and opportunities I have received to improve my teaching skills and methods, I have concluded that the students need to be active participants in their own learning within the classroom.

The idea of being an active participant needs to begin the first day of class. The students need to be guided through the concept of the active learning process, while discussing what their role will be throughout the semester. Additionally, your role as a facilitator not just someone who will spew out information, but to offer a description of what active learning is and the benefits to them and the class as a whole.

An assessment of the class dynamics is an important way to guide the faculty and promote student success. Understanding the different learning styles that present within your group of students offer insight and assists in providing different alternatives to present material. To gauge your group's learning style, you can do a quick survey to see if the students can identify their learning styles and have them briefly explain ways they learn best. Other techniques would be to have them complete a learning style inventory, such as Kolb's learning style inventory (LSI-III) or VARK (visual, aural, read/write, kinesthetic) a simple tool they can complete in class. The website also offers studying strategies once they identify their learning preference.

In nursing classes, the text books are very large and have a lot of content. That alone heightens student's anxiety or the feeling of being overwhelmed, as well causing increased stress among the faculty trying to cover the material. To facilitate the active learning strategies that I wanted to use in class, I needed to ensure that they came prepared but often heard them say "there is so much reading, I

can't remember everything". Therefore, instead of giving them a huge course guide that increased the expectation that the professor is going to 'fill in the blanks' which could lead back to traditional lecture, I provided them questions to research and areas to focus on for the upcoming class. I wanted them to focus on key concepts that I felt was crucial to start a safe and effective nursing career.

Activities were based on their current knowledge coming into class. Activities included case studies, small group activities, gaming and pair-share, etc. Students quickly became aware how difficult it is to participate when they have not prepped for class. When engaging in small group activities and members are not prepared, fellow students demonstrate disappointment among the group.

Another technique I used is experiential learning. Conducting an activity that helps the student to understand how a client feels about a condition or disease can be beneficial to the student's overall learning. It can facilitate sympathy and possible empathy. As an example, one activity used was having the student seek out a client that is currently undergoing cancer treatment or a cancer survivor. They listened to the client with regards to their experiences with the health care system and providers. They were able to learn first hand about treatments and were offered advice from the patients' viewpoint as new and upcoming nurses. The students then reflected on this experience with each other, using online discussions. The students shared that they learned things throughout the process that they can take into their practice.

To assist the students in learning empathy, I felt that they needed to become the client. To have a better understanding of the difficulties one has with a disability, they were instructed to wear an eye patch during class and attempt to do daily activities. Using reflective journaling after the experience, students verbalized that this turned out to be an insightful learning activity.

In conclusion, reflecting back on this year of experimentation of teaching strategies and determining which ones worked best, often depended on the size of group. My focus throughout this year originated from something a fellow educator said, "What do you want them to remember one year from now and what does a beginning entry-level nurse need to know for safe and efficient care".

Keeping this mind when preparing for a new class this will offer me the strength and guidance I need to be a successful educator.

References

Hay Resources Direct: *Kolb Learning Style Inventory*

<http://www.hayresourcesdirect.haygroup.com/>

VARK –A guide to your learning preferences @ <http://www.vark-learn.com/english/index.asp>