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## Activity Based Learning Strategies in Higher Education

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*Active learning is an umbrella term for learning and teaching methods which put the student in charge of their own learning through meaningful activities. They think about and apply what they are learning, in a deliberate contrast to passive learning. Passively listening to a lecture can be useful at promoting learning at the lower end of a taxonomy of learning such as – to ‘remember’ and ‘understand’ – but is not as good at promoting higher-level skills like ‘apply’, ‘analyze’ and ‘evaluate’. “Active learning can be a good way of preparing students for future employment. By integrating activities such as case studies and problem-based learning scenarios into your teaching, it provides the opportunity for students to practice skills which are essential for the workplace.*

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### Introduction

In today’s ultra-competitive work environment, the organization that trains in the most effective and efficient manner possible will always gain the upper hand. With emphasis on process, performance, and employee motivation as the keys to success, there is no denying the fact that learning has become a barometer of an organization’s competitiveness. However, the passive approaches employed for the past generation of learners are now obsolete. Classrooms and lectures are now slowly becoming a thing of the past. The preferred learning approach has now turned the way of active learning methods.

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Now, put technology into the mix and things get a little complicated. First, there is a definite need to adapt active learning activities. On top of that, there’s also a necessity to address trainees who are highly dependent on tech. Utilizing active training methods in the classroom is already a challenge in itself; but now, active online learning has also become part of the equation. This puts learning managers and professionals in a bit of a bind. Today’s learning environment is more dynamic than ever.

Adapting to and getting informed on the latest effective methods have become almost impossible tasks. Technology will keep on evolving; and so, will the learners and learning methodologies. It has now become an integral part of a learning professional’s job to keep up with everything that’s going on. Keeping all that in mind, the learning professional’s biggest

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challenge is effectively addressing the learning needs of this new generation of learners. Doing so will require them to use technology while simultaneously fostering an active learning environment and staying updated on modern learning approaches.

### Active learning Ideas that involve technology

#### Collaborative Virtual Classrooms

Collaborative virtual classrooms make online learning more engaging. Aside from the usual audio-video conferencing and chat features, virtual classrooms also provide synchronous and asynchronous annotation, communication, and resource sharing for facilitators and participants. It's a definite must-have for any eLearning platform!

#### Mind Mapping / Brainstorming

These two are approaches that can also be classified under active learning methods. Mind mapping and brainstorming are staple methodologies for any problem-solving activity. In these sessions, learners come up with ideas and post them on a board. As a group, the students then select the best ones and use those to come up with a solution. For these methods, there are available apps that allow learners to use their own device and collaborate with others in coming up with a mind-map or idea tree.

#### Scavenger Hunts

Here is another fun and engaging activity that involves the use of the company knowledge base. Scavenger hunts start off with a customer concern. The learner's task is to use the system and find the appropriate resource to address the issue. Not only does it familiarize the learners with the system, but it also prepares them to handle real-life customer scenarios.

#### Role Playing

Role playing is also another effective approach founded on active learning methods. Role playing simulates real-life situation that requires problem-solving skills. More importantly, it is also a medium for gauging actual performance. Role playing activities can include job simulations like customer interaction (facilitator plays the customer, learner the agent) through the phones, email, chat, or in some cases, virtual reality.

#### Data and Tools for Problem-Solving

A combination of a scavenger hunt and role-playing activity, this exercise is one of the more effective active learning strategies for adults. The facilitator assigns a case-study (preferably taken from common customer scenarios) to a learner. The learner, in turn, makes sense of the data and uses the available resources to solve the case.

#### Online Discussion Boards

Online discussion boards are also one of many proven active participation strategies. Online boards are virtual boards where students can learn collaboratively. They post questions and

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answer queries. Most of the time, there is very little facilitator or subject matter expert intervention involved, with most answers usually coming from the other participants who are more knowledgeable on the topic.

### Learning by Teaching

In a nutshell, learning by teaching means that you allow learners to prepare and teach the lessons (or part of them) to their fellow students. Although it may look like the facilitator is taking a very hands-off approach in this method, it actually involves a very elaborate process where the facilitator is both moderator and subject matter expert.

Do take note that learning by teaching does not simply mean a presentation or a lecture presented by the learners. In this particular approach, the learners are the ones who are facilitating the session by engaging with fellow students. The facilitator ensures that the learning gets processed correctly and also lends a hand to the student-hosts. Webinars and online discussion boards are the usual media used for this methodology.

### The Jigsaw Technique

The Jigsaw Technique is another approach that fully reaps the benefits of active participation and collaborative learning. In this approach, learners are given a “piece of the puzzle” that they need to solve on their own. After this, they need to collaborate with other learners to finally complete the puzzle. This approach would be a good addition to role playing and using data/tools to not only solve bigger problems but also gives participants a glimpse of the ‘bigger picture.’ It is a good exercise to let learners realize their role in the bigger picture by doing both individual and collaborative work and how those are all part of a process.

### The ‘Flipped Classroom’

The flipped classroom is a fairly new term in the learning and EdTech industry. Lessons are ‘flipped;’ meaning that most of the work like reading and research are all done outside of class. This goes in contrast to the traditional approach where most of the class time is used for lectures, and activities are assigned as homework. Flipping a classroom leaves more time for the facilitator to implement active learning methods during class time. This concept works on making efficient use of class time with less (or no) lectures, and more time for activities.

### Game-based Learning

GBL is, arguably, the most fun among all the active learning methods. Game-based learning, or gamification, is turning a certain aspect of learning (or business) into a game. There are available learning apps that let you do this, but you can also create your own! Just don’t forget to apply the three elements of gamification – achievement, competition, and fun – into the endeavor.

The ever-evolving relationship between tech and learning methods. There are still multitudes of activities for active learning methods out there. With the help of technology, learning managers and professionals have been presented more options on how to

better engage today's tech-dependent audience. Nevertheless, it will now only be a matter of time before tech advances again and learning methodologies evolve with it. Learning professionals just have to either keep up and adapt or get disconnected from their learners.

## Conclusion

The consequence of the ever more important role of knowledge for the economic and social prosperity and of the focus on the active role of individuals in the building of his knowledge is the tendency to implement the new guidelines in the organization of the teaching process where the teaching – learning relationship is more flexible, students are encouraged to take an active role in instruction processes and the teaching outcomes must include the acquisition of knowledge but also the gaining of competences.

The goals of education defined through the learning outcomes or development of competences cannot be realized by sheer usage of traditional didactic strategies, approaches and methods, and more efficient form of teaching and learning are required. The goal of this paper is to direct the attention to strategies of teaching at the higher educational level, in particular the strategies which foster active learning and acquisition not only of new knowledge but also skills and attitudes in answer to the requirements of the rapid technological development and contemporary labour market.

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