

Step 4. Teaching/Learning Activities

Active Learning: students learn more and retain their learning longer if they acquire it in an active rather than a passive manner. Active learning means “involving students in doing things and thinking about the things they are doing” (Bonwell and Eison, 1991).

Fink’s Holistic View of Active Learning Consists of 3 parts:

1. **Information & Ideas:** exposure to the content of the course
2. **Experience:** doing, observing, simulating using the content
3. **Reflective Dialogue:** formal or informal writings or conversations that ask students to think about what they experienced and what they learned

2 Principles to Guide Your Choice of Learning Activities:

1. An Effective Set of learning activities is one that includes activities from *each* of the three components.
2. We should try to find *direct* kinds of learning activities whenever possible as opposed to indirect kinds of learning.
 - a. **Direct learning** consists of exposure to primary data and primary sources, “real doing” in authentic settings or direct observation of phenomena, and reflective thinking or journaling independently or with others.
 - b. **Indirect learning** consists of exposure to secondary data and sources, lectures, and textbooks; doing case studies, simulations, or role play as opposed to “real doing”; or indirect observation through stories via film, text, podcast, etc.

1. Rich Learning Experiences: certain experiences are “rich” because they allow students to acquire several kinds of significant learning simultaneously. What are some ways this can be done?

Action: Identify some learning activities to add to your course that will give students a “Doing” or “Observing” experience. What “Rich Learning Experiences” are appropriate for your course?

2. In-Depth Reflective Dialogue: Another important ingredient of active learning is giving students time and encouragement to reflect on the meaning of their learning experience. In reflective writing, students address questions such as: *What* am I learning? What is the *value* of what I am learning? *How* am I learning? *What else* do I need to learn?

Action: What kinds of Reflective Dialogue can you incorporate into your learning activities for your course?

3. Information and Ideas: In order to free up some class time for the experiential and reflective activities identified above, you will probably need to explore alternative ways of introducing students to the key information and ideas of the course, i.e., the content. This might involve having them do more reading before they come to class. Or it may mean creating a course-specific website where you put content-related material. Or you can direct students to go to selected websites that have good content related to the course.

Action: Other than lectures, what ways can you identify to cause students to get their initial exposure to subject matter and ideas (preferably outside of class)?