Chapter 2
Active Learning From Early Childhood to Adolescence and Beyond:
Teaching Curious Minds and Empowering Lifelong Learning

Sara Al Suwaidi
Department of Education and Knowledge, UAE

ABSTRACT

This chapter will focus on active learning and its application from the early years through adolescence. It will explore effective and impactful approaches and methods that promote critical thinking, engagement, and a love of learning in students of all ages. Active learning is not a brand-new idea; in fact, an early definition of the strategy describes it as "instructional activities involving students in doing things and thinking about what they are doing." Therefore, rather than just disseminating knowledge, active learning tactics encourage students to partake in activities that call for higher-order thinking, such as reading, talking, and writing. They typically emphasize the value of having pupils reflect on their own attitudes and ideals as well.

INTRODUCTION

The earlier definition of active learning is so broad that Bonwell and Eison (1991) freely admit that it may cover a wide range of activities. They recommend a range of techniques to encourage active learning, from the very straightforward (such as interrupting lectures to let students debate their ideas with neighbors in order to clarify and organize them) to the more intricate (such as using case studies as a focal point for decision-making). Active learning can only be validated as successful when placed alongside assessment, and the distinction between active learning and formative assessment is hazy and difficult to define, according to Handelsman,et al., (2007). After all, teaching that encourages students'

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active learning requires them to do or produce something, which can then help assess understanding (Handelsman et al., 2007).

Any strategy to engage students and enhance learning can be highly dependent on the age of the students and the subject matter involved (Khalil et al., 2023; Qablan et al., 2023; Qablan & Al-Qaderi, 2009), but no matter what their age, all students learn best when they are comfortable in the learning environment (Deignan, 2018). The place of learning through play in the early years is often replaced, as play is seen as increasingly less relevant after the age of eight (Ward, 2016; Zosh et al., 2017). However, considering the common elements of active learning approaches, certain broad strategies can be considered indicative of active learning pedagogy. These frequently include group discussions, exercises that require students to solve problems, and hands-on activities that encourage student engagement and participation (Saunders, 2020). These tactics are meant to encourage teamwork, critical thinking, and the use of information in practical situations. Additionally, technology and multimedia technologies are frequently used in active learning strategies to improve the educational process and offer chances for self-directed learning. In general, these techniques enable students to actively participate in their own education, which promotes a deeper comprehension and memory of the subject matter (Saunders, 2020).

According to Saunders (2020), active learning not only fosters a creative environment for the learner but also allows the teacher to develop their own creative abilities. As noted in the opening section, definitions of active learning can be broad, and there are many different variations. However, after gathering written definitions of active learning from more than three hundred students, Freeman et al., (2014) came up with a consensus definition that sees active learning placing an emphasis on students using higher order thinking to complete tasks or take part in class discussions (Freeman et al., 2014). They also emphasize how group projects and active learning typically go hand in hand in their definition. Students develop knowledge and comprehension as a result of active learning, which is a process that is frequently referred to as active learning. Although the tasks vary, all of them require students to engage higher order thinking (Freeman et al., 2014). Metacognition, or students' reflection on their own learning, is an essential element that creates the link between activity and learning, even though it isn't usually expressed explicitly (Abdallah et al,2023).

The core of active learning is constructivism, a learning theory that emphasizes the notion that students construct or build their understanding (Cambridge University, 2020). In his research on how children's minds grow, constructivist psychologist Jean Piaget (1896–1981) observed that each child's knowledge steadily accumulates over time. As they attempt to make sense of the world, children replace or change their existing knowledge and understanding with deeper degrees of understanding (Cambridge University, 2020). Social contact with others, such as a teacher or a learner's peers, is considered to be the main way that learning takes place, according to social constructivism. The social constructivist Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934) coined the term "zone of proximal development" (ZPD). This area, which sits in the middle of what the learner can complete on their own and what they can complete with expert assistance, should be the focus of learning activities (Cambridge University, 2020).

There are notable benefits to active learning approaches. Active learning techniques pose a challenge to the conventional, or "banking," model of education because it assumes that students will merely listen and take notes without engaging with or critically analyzing the material (Freire, 1968). The most that students may expect from classic "banking" methods is to repeat what they learned in an exam or paper. Active learning places a strong emphasis on the student and promotes involvement, interaction, and reflection. The social constructivist learning models of Vygotsky, in which the learner constructs understanding through interaction and society, are strongly related to active learning (McLeod, 2023).