ENGAGE TO ACHIEVE MORE

Research-Backed Strategies for Implementing Active Learning for Better Student Engagement

Macmillan Learning Science and Insights

An Overview of Active Learning

Active learning is essential to any teaching technique that involves student participation and engagement during class time. Through active learning, higher-order thinking and cognition are enabled. It's not always about group work or peer-to-peer interactions or even lab work. Active learning can take place in many forms, so it's better to think about the way students are engaging to define it.

Sometimes this is easier when framing out what active learning is not. It's not what happens when students sit in a classroom and receive information through a lecture that lasts the entirety of the session. This is passive engagement. All students are doing is listening to the instructor.

Active learning has an element of manipulation to it. When a student raises their hand during a lecture to ask a question, that's the start of a level of engagement that's active. Another example of solo active learning is when a student responds to an end-of-class reflection question. This is where they can ask for more information on something they didn't understand or regarding a topic where they just want to know more. Of course, activities like think-pair-share and other types of peer-to-peer interaction clearly qualify as active learning.

This is an effective strategy because students who actively engage with what they're learning understand the material better. What's even more important, active learning reaches across all educational contexts. It's not just for one subject. It also works regardless of class size or course level.

The results produced by active learning go beyond good grades and high test scores. Active learning helps build student confidence and improves their perception of themselves as a learner.

With all the positives of active learning, it's still surprising when entering a classroom, of any kind, that's not implementing at least one related strategy. So, before talking about how to bring active learning into your classroom, it's essential to explore what might be stopping you.

Roadblocks to Active Learning Implementation

Instructors who do not use active learning strategies in their classroom most often cite three primary roadblocks:

1. Limited time. Direct instruction of core concepts, vocabulary, and other components that make up the "basics" take up the bulk of any class. There's little time left for active learning. Maybe there would be time if all students came to class prepared, but it's hard to ensure that happens.

2. A lack of resources and content. Not all instructors have the capacity to develop the right resources themselves to create an effective piece to their class that utilizes active learning strategies.

3. A lack of training. Without guidance, instructors aren't able to effectively implement active learning strategies. This makes it even harder to put what little time they may have toward developing something new for their students.
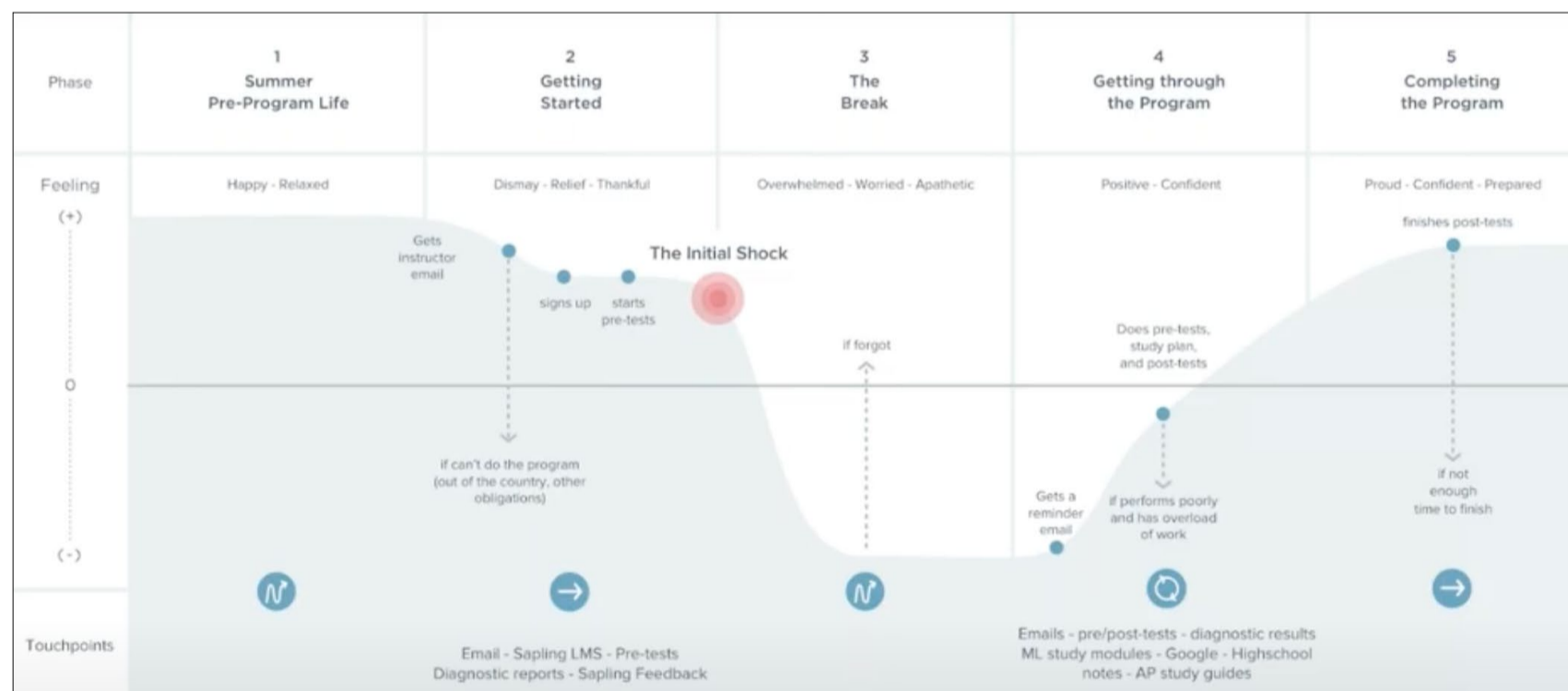
These roadblocks impact instructors despite the fact that the research is telling them the techniques are effective. So, there is a need for tools that make it possible for instructors to overcome these hindrances and to feel comfortable with inserting active learning into their curriculum.

Macmillan Learning Achieve

This next-generation online learning system easily integrates into most schools' LMS. The platform was developed using a whole host of qualitative research—student focus groups, structured interviews, and more—to make it as useful as possible for instructors and students.

Research includes more than just operational feedback. The goal was to look at the entire academic journey through a semester, stopping at each major point, to evaluate where students feel the strongest, where they feel the most anxiety, and where they feel they're disengaging (or engaging) in conversations. Here's what the data showed:

Using this research made it possible to create a platform that takes the most effective components of existing tools and combines them in a way that provides students with the most support throughout their semester-long journey in the classroom.

Additionally, this active learning model identifies activities that instructors can assign for students to complete before, during, or after class throughout the semester.

The ease of implementation within these active learning activities paves the way for instructors to increase engagement in a seamless and timely way.

This tool, though, is only part of the equation to successful active learning. There are also research-based, empirically-vetted strategies to explore and get to know.

Pre-class Activities

This strategy chips away at the roadblock of not having enough classroom time for active learning. If you simply can't add another thing to your class while it's in session, assign pre-class activities that engage active learning.

Make sure the activities have clear and direct instructions and reinforcing questions to encourage students to focus on core concepts. The right pre-class activities will get students ready to raise their hands in class, whether it's to ask a question or answer one.

This strategy works because it doesn't fundamentally change the pedagogical approach of the class. All instructors are doing is assigning a new activity to do outside of class time. Because this activity better prepares them for class, it easily segues into active engagement during lecture. Prepared students don't have to sit and listen to all the basics; instead, they can ask questions based on the information they've already explored before class.

It's also important for students to understand why doing these pre-class activities matter. Simply assigning them doesn't drive home their importance. Instead, introduce this portion of the course by saying research supports that doing these activities allows you to come to class more prepared. Being more prepared for class means you can potentially do better on tests and other graded assignments.

You can **review the data** related to pre-class activities and student achievement.

If using Achieve to assign pre-class activities, you can capture student performance in an analytics dashboard. This then allows students to see what core concepts they've mastered and which they're struggling with. Instructors can see this information too and tailor lectures to address any weak points running through the majority of the class.

iClicker Integration

The iClicker student response system addresses the issue of instructors not having the capacity to develop resources on their own (and the time to manage student engagement activities).

Although using iClickers does change the pedagogical approach, having an easy way to ask questions and collect answers enables instructors to implement a little active learning with minimal effort. Being very easy to use, this tool enhances your teaching by allowing you to reinforce the core concepts you've just lectured about. It also gets students thinking between key sections of your lecture.

Research into the use of iClickers shows promising results no matter the motivation levels of the students, how academically prepared they are, or whether the instructor is new to integrating this particular tool. Results always show improved scores for students who used iClicker in the classroom.

Here are **the metrics** connected to academic performance and iClicker use.

Developed by subject matter experts, iClicker questions are included for every discipline in Achieve. Instructors don't have to spend their own time writing questions and capturing responses, removing a very time-consuming element to active learning in the classroom. iClicker also seamlessly integrates with the Achieve gradebook.

In-class Activity Guides

To get past the "training and guidance" roadblock of implementing active learning activities, in-class activity guides offer instructors a one-stop shop to increase student engagement.

By using active learning pedagogy, both instructors new to these strategies and active learning veterans can implement activities from these guides. Not only that, but having comprehensive activities already fully crafted helps propel students to do more active learning than other less-formed options where the instructor has to step in and add to it.

Having the ability to easily introduce active learning activities into the classroom not only increases student engagement in class, but can enhance peer-to-peer interaction beyond the classroom. One observer noticed their students met more frequently in small groups in the library after having the opportunity to work together more during class.

See a **case study** of success.

The in-class activity guides in Achieve offer step-by-step guidance on activities instructors can implement within the classroom. These activities boost student engagement, and are available in multiple disciplines. These guides also suggest resources instructors can use for pre-class and post-class activities should you want to widen the depth of your active learning opportunities. All additional activities are easy-to-assign right within the system.

The Right Tools Make Active Learning Possible

Barriers to incorporating a proven learning tool should never be insurmountable. However, many instructors aren't using active learning strategies because of the time and training required. Finding a tool that eliminates these issues by using research-driven results to craft all-in-one activities bridges this gap. It allows you to actively engage students and better prepare them to achieve higher levels of success in your class.

If you're looking for intuitive learning support solutions to help you engage all students regardless of level of preparation, wherever instruction happens, look to the breakthrough combination of Macmillan Learning's Achieve platform and its fully integrated classroom response system, iClicker. Seamlessly integrated into your campus's Learning Management System, Achieve and iClicker deliver powerful media and assessment tools that give every student a voice.

For more information about Achieve, our online learning system please visit
https://www.macmillanlearning.com/ed/uk/digital/achieve

Contact your local Macmillan Learning representative:
https://www.macmillanlearning.com/ed/uk/rep/find-your-rep-institution