

Active Learning

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In virtually every medical school today, a continuous tension exists between tradition and innovation. Most of our days are spent sitting in lecture halls, and little time has been allocated for the active exchange of ideas. Changes are needed in medical education to anticipate the circumstances that today's medical students will confront in the future. Educationists now firmly believe that active learning is the best possible means of developing the minds of future physicians. An essential element of today's education is enjoyment of the learning process. In recent years medical curriculum has been changing internationally from a very traditional faculty-oriented model to a student-oriented model based on adult learning strategies.

Brain changes physiologically as a result of experience and it happens much quicker than originally thought (plasticity of brain). The environment in which the brain operates determines to a large extent the functioning ability of the brain [1]. In recent years, educationists have found that many principles of adult learning also apply to the children as well as adolescents. Adults and children prefer learning experiences that are participatory; they learn faster when concepts are useful in their present as well as future lives. The role of an educator for the young and elderly person is to assess the audience's interest, current skills and aims and this information guides the structuring of a learning atmosphere and selection of methods most satisfying and effective for the learners. Our brains are far more individualized in terms of Physiology, neural wiring, Bio-chemical balance and developmental stage than previously thought [2]. Learning is growth and is often very challenging. As teachers, it is our responsibility to facilitate student learning. It is almost natural to guide another's learning in the same manner in which you (teacher) learn. If this method worked for everyone there would not be any questions about learning or any motivation to understand how individuals learn. But, learning is complex. One student will learn from a few sentences of instruction and another would learn from a simple demonstration. Some students seem to struggle despite our best efforts. Classroom is the teacher's laboratory – you will want to experiment with various approaches to teaching and discover which approaches are most effective at promoting students learning. Taking the time to plan your teaching and reflect on the effectiveness of teaching will allow to develop teaching skills that will meet the learning needs of a broad range of students.

Teaching is not just telling and learning is not just listening. "Tell me and I will forget; show me and I may remember; involve me and I will understand" –Chinese Proverb. Learning is more comfortable and effective when the environmental conditions support open exchange, sharing of opinions and problem-solving strategies. The atmosphere should foster trust and acceptance of different ideas and values. Learning improves when the learner is an active participant in the educational process. When selecting among several teaching methods, it is best to choose the method that allows the learner to become most involved. Using varied methods of

teaching helps the learner maintain interest and may help to reinforce concepts without being repetitious. Learning can be cognitive – new knowledge, psychomotor – a new physical skill or affective – learning how to better communicate. Current research supports the notion that the brain learns best through rich, complex and multi-sensory environment [2]. Simulations and role-plays mimic the natural learning environment and encourage complex processing of available information. Learning is enhanced by challenge and inhibited by threat [2]. Enriched learning environments can be orchestrated through the components of challenge, novelty, choice, high feedback, social interaction, and active participation [3]. The benefits of enriched, multi-sensory and complex learning environments must continue to be supported by the research and practice of such strategies must play a larger role in the classroom of the future.

References

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