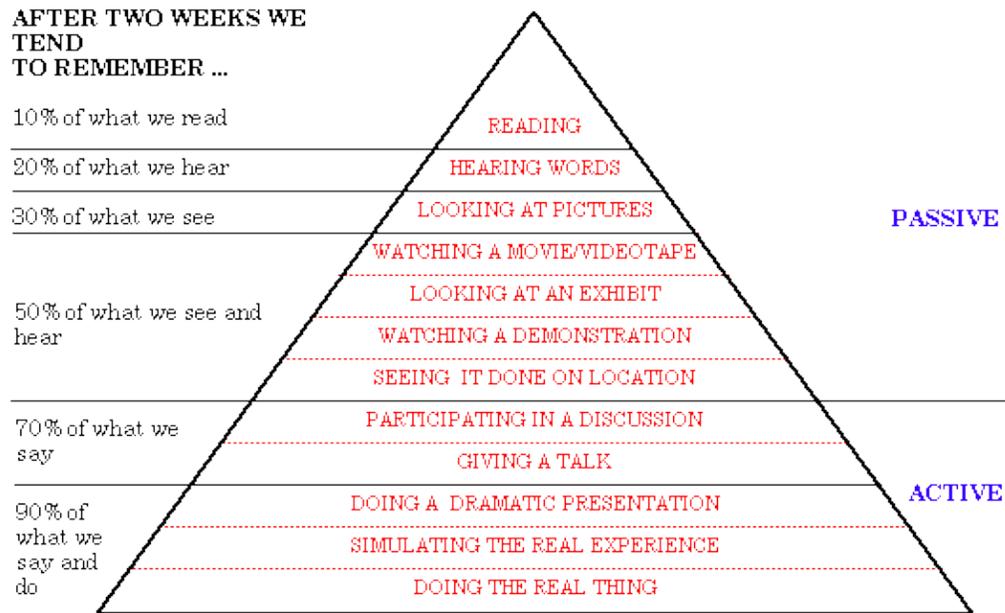


Bringing Real Active Learning into the Classroom

By Corey Rosenlee



Adapted from: Edgar Dale *Audio-Visual Methods in Teaching*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

If we accept the premise the best way to learn is by doing the real thing then how do we incorporate those beliefs into our classrooms. Active learning has been a buzz word in education for decades, but is what we are doing in our class actually active learning or is it something which I have defined as active assessment? The difference is presented in these two different assignments where each teacher believes they are doing active learning.

Example #1: Teacher A has students read a story from the Great Depression and then has students write and act in a play based on what they read.

Example #2 Teacher B recreates the Great Depression by putting the students into a married couple and then has students live through the Great Depression by going through a variety of events.

Now it may seem like both students are doing active learning, but example #1 is a great example of active assessment. You have to first ask the question, how did the students learn the material to be able to do the play? The students read the information without the teacher and the only basis for understanding the depth of their comprehension is the play. What if they didn't read, what if they skimmed the information, or have low reading comprehension and did not understand what they read. Most students do not have the ability to take what they read and by themselves make that interesting enough for other students to watch. Even some teachers have difficulty doing that. What the teacher is doing is grading them based on what they are reading and comprehending. The method of learning is still passive (reading), but the grade (the play) is based on their comprehension of the passive experience.

Teacher B simulates the real experience and students learned by doing. When being assessed, it can now be based on their experiences. Now that the students have learned, the teacher can move up Bloom's taxonomy by critical analyzing the student experience by making evaluative decisions. Students in the first example never get that opportunity to use higher level thinking. .

First before explaining how teachers can use active learning in their own classroom, let's explore what active learning is not. Group work or cooperative learning by itself is not active learning. Most lessons starting with a passive experience (reading, lecture, listening, and watching) are not active learning. Learning that is active but

abstract from the concept students are trying to learn (drawing, plays, letter writing, newspapers) is not active learning. Now each of those could be active learning if they happen first. If students are learning how to be activists they can write letters to politicians to advocate for a cause, and that is active. But if the student had to write a letter to Lincoln saying why they support or don't support the Civil War, it is still based on knowledge gained from a passive experience.

The first question any teacher needs to ask when designing a new lesson is, how is what I am teaching happen in the real world. Then how can I have my students do what real world people do. If this can't be done, then how can I recreate what people do in the real world in my classroom.

The difficulty of doing this in today's classrooms is that many teachers did not learn this in their own schools when they were growing up. Also to do a real world lesson or simulation requires more work than say a lecture or a worksheet. When teachers first start out they don't have the time to create these lessons, especially if they are teaching a variety of courses. Then as time progresses they go back to what they initially did, thus continuing the cycle.

To rectify this problem we need to first of all train teachers in how to create real world lessons. Second, give teachers time to see what is already out there so they can use these in their classes. Not all teaching is equal, administrators need to monitor and encourage higher level thinking and active learning strategies.