Part I: Describe

*Workshop Title:* Active Learning  
*Date:* 02/12/2009  
*Location:* Research Building 3 (2nd floor conference room)  
*Attendance:* 10 – 15 people  
*Presenter:* Dr. Barbi Honeycutt

*Purpose Statement and General Overview:*  
The goal of this workshop was to introduce the participants to active learning. The workshop was not only intended to help define active learning, but also to provide answers to the practical questions of why and how.

After an initial icebreaker the instructor began by asking the participants for their definition of active learning. The exercise proved was that active learning has different meaning to different individuals. The definition I used and the one that I have settled on is “learning by doing”.

To address why active learning is important the instructor used both quantitative research data and well as qualitative data. The quantitative data was presented in a chart that showed that after 2 weeks 90% of the participants remembered what the material if they both said and did something during the learning process. This is in contrast to 10% for reading only, 20% for hearing, and 30% for seeing.

To present the qualitative data the instructor addressed active learning from both the perspective of a student and the teacher. For example, from a student’s perspective active learning engages the student and promotes the desire to become a self-direct learner; from a teacher’s perspective it helps keep the material fresh and allows the students more control of their learning environment.

To address how to incorporate active learning the instructor provided a list of techniques and incorporated many of those techniques into the workshop. For example, the instructor collected name cards and used those cards to call on people throughout the workshop. Additionally, we participated in a role-playing exercise where we read a case study and assumed the roles of the people within the study.

The final part of the workshop was focused on how to begin to incorporate active learning into the classroom. Some of the key points were to start it on the first day of class, start with smaller activities, be persistent, and don’t give up. Another, key that was mentioned was to evaluate the effectiveness of the active learning activities frequently in order to ensure that you are choosing the right activities for your particular class and that they comprehend the material.
Part II: Analyze

There were three specific areas that I felt were the most valuable aspects of the workshop. Specifically, those areas were balance, strategies, and evaluation. For the remainder of this section I will elaborate on each of the areas in more detail.

For all of the positives that active learning brings to the table it also has its negatives. For that reason a classroom needs to have a healthy balance of both active learning and traditional passive (lecture-style) learning. For example, during the workshop we discussed that in an active learning environment the instructor gives partial control of the learning environment to the students. While this can be good in moderation, doing so without balance can foster an environment where the instructor is not able to effectively guide the students toward the learning outcome because he/she has lost control of the classroom.

Further, active learning tasks may enable the learning of some students, but there may also be students who learn better via lecturing. In order to develop well-rounded students who are able to comprehend information presented in different ways we must find the balance in the classroom.

The second topic that I found to be most helpful was the discussion on different active learning strategies that we can employ in the classroom. The strategies were in essence different genres of active learning techniques such as games, case studies, and name cards. One of the primary strategies in the workshop was using name cards. Students fill out a card with their name and optionally some generic information. The instructor then collects the cards and uses them in a variety of ways. For instance, the cards can be used to randomly call on a student for the answer, divide the class into groups, and help the instructor memorize names.

Another important lesson learned regarding strategies was that you don’t need to reinvent the wheel. There are numerous existing resources that instructors can use to come up with ideas for activities as well as tools to help execute those activities. For example, there are websites that have powerpoint templates for game shows such as “jeopardy” and “who wants to be a millionaire”.

The third topic that I found helpful in the workshop was the discussion of evaluation. We discussed how to evaluate the effectiveness of an active learning activity. My conclusion from the discussion is that feedback is the best form of evaluation. Student feedback is the most important form of feedback but not the only one. Feedback can also be given from other instructors who sit in on the class or from friends or family with whom you discuss the activity with.

In conclusion, I would like to briefly discuss how I aim to practically apply these three areas to my classroom. First, to find the right balance of active learning in the classroom I must weigh the pros and cons of each active learning activity in my lesson plan. Second, I must make sure to employ various types of active learning activities. Each
class session should not employ just one type of activity. Further, to keep the planning time reasonable I should use existing resources and technology where possible. Finally, after new activities (and occasionally older ones) I need to survey the class to find out what did and didn’t work during the activity. I will then take that feedback into account for future activities.