

INTRODUCTION TO ACTIVE LEARNING

A MODULE FOR EDUCATORS

Module Guide

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INTRODUCTION TO ACTIVE LEARNING OVERVIEW OF MODULE GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

The invitation to develop a module on active learning was very compelling. We are curriculum specialists with a longstanding interest in and love of active learning. The possibility that our experience might be of some help to other educators is exciting, yet humbling. Despite our efforts to follow events in Bosnia-Herzegovina, we cannot truly comprehend the conditions under which teachers and students are striving to live and learn. As we tried to imagine teaching children in the aftermath of war, we questioned what part of our knowledge and experience might possibly be relevant to the challenges you face.

We have been told that traditional instructional materials are scarce and that you are looking for ways in which to improvise educational activities. A number of our colleagues have prepared modules that focus either on specific subject areas (e.g., math, science) or specific types of learning activities (e.g., creative dramatics, journal writing). It is assumed that teachers will have to adapt these ideas to fit their unique, and perhaps volatile, circumstances.

The purpose of this module is to provide a framework for helping teachers to reconceptualize their role in active learning. The framework is articulated in an essay, entitled *School-Making in Nations in Transition: A Rationale for Active Learning*. A suggested plan for a two-day workshop is included in the module to give educators a firsthand experience with active learning. Also included are theoretic explanations for each workshop session. These are intended to clarify the underlying concepts and principles of active learning as it is carried out in the workshop.

ORGANIZATION OF THE GUIDE

The module entitled, "Introduction to Active Learning," is intended for use with teachers and teacher-educators. It is organized as a two-day workshop with supportive materials provided in this Guide. The sections of the Guide include:

Workshop Agenda. Describes an overall structure and process for the two-day workshop including a suggested schedule of activities.

School-Making in Nations in Transition--A Rationale for Active Learning. In addition to articulating a framework for active learning, this essay represents a body of subject matter that might otherwise be presented through a lecture.

Reflective Writing Assignment. This worksheet provides a space for participants to record their responses to the experience of the workshop and to practice reflective writing skills.

Theoretic Explanations of the Workshop Process. These commentaries help to explain some of the key issues that educators might consider as they enact active learning in the classroom. **Workshop Leaders should carefully review these explanations as they prepare to work with teachers and/or teacher-educators.**

USING THE GUIDE

The format of the Guide has been designed to give workshop leaders some flexibility in sharing materials with participants. Options for using the Guide include:

Provide a copy of the entire Guide as written to each participant at the beginning of the workshop.

Provide a copy of the agenda pages to each participant at the beginning of the workshop and distribute copies of the essay, reflective writing assignment and theoretic explanations as appropriate throughout the workshop.

Distribute the theoretic explanations at the end of the workshop.

Provide a copy of the essay as written and a modified workshop agenda to suit their particular needs.

Regardless of what option the workshop leader chooses, it is strongly recommended that a written copy of the agenda be provided to the participants to minimize the potential for confusion.

Workshop leaders may want to supplement the materials in this Guide with information they have acquired from other sources.

PEDAGOGY FOR THE WORKSHOP

It is important to recognize that schooling and pedagogy are concerned with learning in groups through human interaction. This workshop brings individuals together so they can be engaged with the subject matter in an interactive way. It is imperative that special attention be given to the way in which learning groups are organized. A variety of group configurations have been included in the workshop to help participants understand the possibilities for organizing students in their own practice setting. In addition, by taking part in a variety of configurations and experiencing the effects of each for themselves, participants are encouraged to consider how different group configurations can influence different pedagogical results. Because cooperative learning in groups is often a necessary part of active learning, specific training in group process, which is beyond the scope of this module, is desirable.

Potential configurations for learners include:

- Individual = One participant working alone
- Diad = 2 participants
- Triad = 3 participants
- Small group = 3 - 7 participants
- Medium group = 8 - 15 participants
- Large group = 16 or more participant

Depending upon the length of an educational experience and the number of learners who are participating in that experience, it may be desirable to include more than one group configurations. This principle is demonstrated within the suggested workshop format as participants are given opportunities to work individually, in diads, and in small, medium, and large groups. Although guidelines for configuring groups have been suggested, Workshop Leaders should use some discretion in forming groups based on the overall number of participants in any given workshop.

In addition to varying the group on the basis of size, it is also possible and desirable to vary the purpose of the group. During the workshop participants are asked to come together in three group configurations:

Large Group consists of the leader(s) and all participants in the workshop. Large group sessions are useful for giving general information, increasing accountability among workshop participants, reinforcing key concepts and principles, and sharing products from smaller cooperative learning groups.

A **think group** is a cooperative learning group that comes together to discuss complex ideas. Each person brings a potential position which can be examined, critiqued, elaborated and/or

contradicted. In this way, knowledge is generated by the stance and counter stance of the discussants' ideas. For purposes of this workshop, think groups are of medium size.

A **work group** is a cooperative learning group that comes together to accomplish a task collaboratively. Usually, the task involves creation of a product such as a lesson plan, an instructional activity, a set of educational materials, evaluation procedures and so on. The assumption is that when people work together they bring more resources to the task so that a richer product can be created than if a person worked on a task individually. For purposes of this workshop, work groups are configured as small groups.

It should be noted that a total of 16 - 25 participants in a workshop creates a situation in which the discussion of ideas can occur among all participants. In the workshop agenda for this module, it was assumed that there would be more than 25 participants. If, in fact, the total registration is less than 25, then Workshop Leaders may want to adjust the agenda. Smaller configurations can be used for cooperative learning groups with more time being given to reports and discussion within the total group. When there are more than 25 participants in a Workshop, it is cumbersome to do a great deal of work with the entire group.

A FINAL THOUGHT

The information provided in this Guide is meant to call attention to issues that merit consideration by all those involved in an active learning experience. The most important point to remember, however, is that the heart of active learning is the interaction among the unique set of individuals who enter into a shared experience. The needs, experiences, and expertise of these individuals are both the rich resources for education. Above all else, the humanity and individuality of the leaders and participants must be respected, valued, and affirmed. Workshop leaders are reminded that the reality of any educational encounter is in the lived experience not in the written plan. With this thought in mind, we wish you every success as you initiate active learning endeavors.

INTRODUCTION TO ACTIVE LEARNING WORKSHOP AGENDA--DAY 1

Session 1 (Day 1, Morning)

Title of Activity: Welcome and Introduction to Workshop
Type of Activity: Presentation to All Workshop Participants
Length: 15 minutes
Purpose: To give participants an “anticipatory map” for the day’s activities.
Directions: Workshop Leader reviews with participants the time frames and flow of the day’s activities.

Session 2 (Day 1, Morning)

Title of Activity: Forming Work Groups
Type of Activity: Small Group Discussion
Length: 60 minutes
Purpose: To give participants an overview of workshop and the plan for Day 1.
Directions: Participants are asked to form small groups of 3 - 5 members, preferably with individuals they do not know.

Participants are asked to spend approximately 60 minutes introducing themselves to each other. Introductions might include a description of their school setting and their teaching situation.

Session 3 (Day 1, Morning)

Title of Activity: What Do We Mean by Active Learning?
Type of Activity: Individual Reading and Discussion within Work Groups
Length: 90 minutes
Purpose: To provide workshop participants with a rationale for active learning and to help participants make personal connections to the concept of active learning.
Directions: Participants should reconvene in the same Work Group from the previous session.

Participants have approximately 30 minutes to read the essay, *School Making in Nations in Transition: A Rationale for Active Learning* and to choose three ideas that they would like to discuss with members of their Work Group.

(If participants want to take a toilet break, they should do so during the 30 minutes.)

At the end of 30 minutes, participants should begin to share with other member of the group, the ideas they identified. The Work Group have approximately 60 minutes for this discussion.

Lunch Break

Type of Activity: Social or Reflective Time
Length: 60 minutes

Purpose: To provide workshop participants with an opportunity to interact in a less formal, social situation, or to have some quiet time for themselves.

Directions: The workshop leader should have informed participants about the plans for lunch during the introduction to the workshop. Participants should note the time and location for reconvening.

Session 4 (Day 1, Afternoon)

Title of Activity: Designing Active Learning Activities in Work Groups
Type of Activity: Work Session and Work Group Report to all workshop participants
Length: 2 hours for work session
15 minute break
1 hour for report session
15 minute wrap up

Purpose: To give workshop participants an opportunity to practice designing an active learning activity.

To give workshop participants an opportunity to share their active learning activities with each other.

Directions: Using the categories of instructional activities as a guide (see the section of the essay entitled, "Concept of Active Learning"), each work group is asked to design at least one active learning activity.

As the group works on the activity, participants should describe the nature of the activity, the instructional purpose of the activity, and the learners for whom the activity is intended.

The activity should be relevant to the instructional goals of at least one member of the group.
If time permits, the group might want to design more than one activity.

At the end of the two hour work session, participants have an opportunity to take a break.

When the participants reconvene, each group is asked to describe one activity they designed.

After all groups have reported, the Workshop Leader may spend approximately 15 minutes summarizing key ideas or questions that have emerged from the day's activities.

Before the group adjourns for the day, all participants should review the Reflective Writing assignment to be completed in the evening.

Session 5 (Day 1, Evening)

Title of Activity: Reflections on Active Learning
Type of Activity: Individual Writing Assignment
Length: At least 30 minutes

Purpose: To provide workshop participants with an opportunity to practice reflection and reflective writing.

Directions: Participants are asked to spend at least 30 minutes responding to the question on the assignment sheet included in this Guide.
Note that participants will have an opportunity to share their reflective writing the following day.

WORKSHOP AGENDA--DAY 2

Session 6 (Day 2, Morning)

Title of Activity: Plan for the Day
Type of Activity: Presentation by workshop leader to all participants
Length: 10 minutes

Purpose: To give participants an “anticipatory map” for the day’s activities.

Directions: Participants have the opportunity to review the time frames and flow of the day’s activities.

Session 7 (Day 2, Morning)

Title of Activity: Sharing Individual Reflective Writing
Type of Activity: Think Group Discussion
Length: 60 minutes

Purpose: To give participants an opportunity to examine the role of reflective writing in active learning.

Directions: Two Work Groups from the preceding day are asked to join together into one Think Group for the purposes of this discussion.

Participants are asked to choose a partner within the Think Group; preferably someone they had not worked with on day 1 of the workshop.

In diads, partners to exchange their Reflective Writing essay from the preceding evening and to spend about 5 minutes reading each other’s essay.

Partners then spend about 15 minutes talking about the ideas in each other’s essays.

At the end of 15 minutes, the diads should rejoin as a Think Groups to continue to discuss the ideas.

BREAK

Give participants an opportunity to take a short (10 minute) break between the first session of the morning and this session. Before participants leave the room, let them know that they should:

- o reconvene in the same think group, and
- o review the sections in the essay, Pedagogy as Human Interaction in Groups and Teaching/Learning Scenarios.

Session 8 (Day 2, Morning)

Title of Activity: Active Learning--Different Roles for Teachers and Learners
Type of Activity: Individual Reading and Think Group Discussion
Length: 1 hour and 40 minutes

Review of Essay Sections--Pedagogy as Human Interaction in Groups and Teaching/Learning Scenarios (15 minutes)

Think Group Discussion (60 minutes)

Individual Reflection (25 minutes, if time permits)

Purpose: To give participants an opportunity to examine the differences in the role of learner based on the teaching scenario that the instructor chooses to follow.

Directions: After individuals have had about 15 minutes to review the essay sections, ask the think groups to begin a discussion of key ideas. Some suggested topics/questions for discussion are:

- o After reviewing the teaching/learning scenarios, which scenarios best describe your current role as teacher and which ones might you want to try out?
- o In your own teaching setting, what are the incentives and difficulties for using the various scenarios? What strategies might be used to overcome the difficulties?
- o The scenarios describe different roles of teachers. How would the roles of learners change in the various scenarios?
- o How can teachers help students develop the skills necessary to take on new learning roles?

If time permits, ask individuals to take 5 minutes of quiet time to reflect on the substance of the group's discussion and to write a brief statement describing one insight that they have gained as a result of the discussion. Once individuals have written their statements, ask them to share their comments with other members of the think group.

LUNCH BREAK

Session 9 (Day 2, Afternoon)

Title of Activity: Refining Active Learning Activities
Type of Activity: Work Session (continued from Day 1)
Length: 2 hours

Purpose: To review the active learning activities that each work group designed during the afternoon of day 1 of the workshop.

To critique the active learning activities based on the information discussed during the morning session and to revise, refine or expand the activities.

To prepare a group report of sample active learning activities that can be submitted to the workshop leader for duplication and dissemination.

Directions: Participants gather in the same Work Groups as Day 1.

Participants have approximately two hours to complete three tasks (see purpose statements above).

As the Work Groups begin their tasks for the afternoon, they can look at the activities generated on day 1 in terms of the following:

- o As designed, which teaching/learning scenario(s) are reflected in the activities?
- o How might the activities be modified or adapted for use in more than one scenario?
- o What other activities might be developed to encourage active learning within each scenario?
- o In order for students to engage in the activities for the various scenarios, what must they know and be able to do?
- o What activities does the group want to submit to the Workshop Leader for duplication and dissemination to other educators?

Session 10 (Day 2, Afternoon)

Title of Activity: Workshop Conclusion
Type of Activity: Discussion with all workshop participants
Length: 60 minutes

Purpose: To provide a sense of closure for workshop participants.

Directions: At the end of the work session, participants reconvene in the large group.

Each work group gives a brief summary of what they accomplished and what they have learned.

As the groups report, the Workshop Leader can use the comments of the participants to reinforce key concepts and principles of active learning.

ESSAY

SCHOOL MAKING IN NATIONS IN TRANSITION: A RATIONALE FOR ACTIVE LEARNING

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INTRODUCTION

In times of social stability, teachers typically function as autonomous instructors within existing school structures. They may see themselves as minor actors in a large and well established institution. Consequently, teachers do not generally see themselves as "school makers," with responsibility for creating or maintaining the infrastructure of the educational environment.

In times of social upheaval or crisis, however, teachers are called upon to broaden the vision of their role. As traditional school infrastructures disintegrate, teachers find themselves in the position of "school making." By school-making we mean building community-like environments and organizing educational activities that support the learning of students who are likely to be geographically displaced and psychologically disoriented. The difficulty of this task is compounded by the scarcity of instructional resources and adequate facilities.

Given these circumstances, it may be impossible to recreate the familiar rituals of schooling. Therefore, it is likely that teachers will be called upon to become school makers and improvise temporary educational environments. The purpose of this module is to provide a framework for helping teachers to reconceptualize their role and to understand that school making is what good teachers do under any circumstances.

This essay invites teachers to:

- o examine the purpose of schooling in times of social transition;
- o recognize the range of activities that are commonly associated with the concept of active learning;
- o consider the importance of active learning in relation to pedagogy as individual learning and pedagogy as human interaction in groups; and
- o consider how active learning is played out in typical classroom scenarios.

PURPOSES OF SCHOOLING FOR NATIONS IN TRANSITION

If good teaching is school making, then it is important for teachers to recognize that the way in which they frame the purpose of school influences the quality of the experience. List below are four examples of ways in which the purpose of school might be framed.

School as Reproducing Culture. This is a traditional view of schooling and assumes a reasonable degree of cultural stability. In this view, the purpose of schooling is to transmit cultural values and expectations, foster habits of good citizenship, convey knowledge and skills, and prepare future generations of workers. Educators often tacitly accept this view of schooling and structure their instruction accordingly. Activities are often used to help students understand subject matter by making connections between the content of the lesson and their personal experience. This view of schooling may not be useful in nations that are experiencing cultural upheaval.

School as Distraction. This view emphasizes schooling as organized activity, somewhat akin to supervised child care. The activities and rituals of school can provide some sense of comfort, order, routine, and normalcy for children who are caught in chaotic situations. In this view, activities help to divert children's attention from the surrounding turmoil and give them a sense that adults are in control of the situation. Faced with large numbers of children in a relatively confined and impermanent space, this purpose of schooling serves a practical need to occupy the children's time.

School as Haven. This view of schooling also embodies the notion of comfort. School offers a safe refuge from the chaos and violence that threaten to engulf children's lives. This view of schooling comes from stories of children who live in the war zones of our country's ghettos. Activities are used, not only as distractors, but also as a means of giving children a sense of "agency." Agency involves a process of making meaning of lived experience. The aim is to give children a sense that in this time and place of school, they have some power and control, not necessarily over the events of their lives, but over the personal meaning of those events.

School as Rebuilding Culture. This view of schooling looks forward to a time when a nation emerges from crisis and begins the process of reconstructing the very fabric of society and culture. The children in today's schools are both the architects and the inhabitants of a new world that cannot yet be imagined.

School as reproducing culture may not seem appropriate to include in a framework of purposes for schooling for nations in transition; however, it is a signal. It provides an important signpost for educators to explore their tacit actions regarding classroom protocol and ritual. It challenges the educator to ask, "What are my taken-for-granted assumptions about what school is? What do I assume school ought to be?"

It may well be that *school as distraction* and *school as haven* are more legitimate frames for nations in crisis. The underlying intent in both visions of schooling is to help children cope with the massive stress in their lives, thereby preserving as much as possible their capacity to heal and learn.

It is our hope that teachers as school makers will be better prepared to embrace *school as rebuilding culture* when the time comes.

Regardless of how they might frame the purpose of school, teachers rely on activities as the centerpiece of their instruction. Often, teachers focus on what works as the mainstay of their practice. Just as teachers must be able to articulate a purpose for schooling, so, too, must they be able to articulate an educative intent for instructional activities. It is assumed that effective instructional activities are grounded in active learning. Therefore, we turn next to an examination of this concept.

CONCEPT OF ACTIVE LEARNING

*Tell me and I may forget.
Show me and I may remember.
Involve me and I understand forever.*

Ben Franklin

In its broadest sense, "active learning" stands in contrast to "passive learning." Beyond this self-evident, common sense distinction lie the questions. (1) What do we mean by active learning? (2) Why is this concept pedagogically important?

To explore the first question, we examined selected literature on active learning.¹ The term is widely used in international discourse on education, and has a variety of interpretations. Active learning is most commonly expressed in the form of instructional activities. Categories of instructional activities include:

Physical Activities as Active Learning. This seems to be the most common (and perhaps most narrow) use of the term. Purposes of this type of active learning include (1) to improve psychomotor skills; (2) to produce more relaxed and playful children who would be willing learners; and (3) to release children's tensions that might inhibit their efforts to learn. In addition, these activities can help to increase the energy of students who tend to be passive and to calm children who tend to be hyperactive. Examples of such active learning might include sports, exercise, physical games, song, and dance. The focus of these activities is not primarily related to subject matter.

Physical Activities Related to Subject Matter as Active Learning. In this approach, bodily movement is a method to be incorporated directly into the learning of subject matter that is usually taught in more passive ways. Physical activity is used to enhance children's academic and mental abilities, such as understanding basic spatial concepts, numbers and mathematics, letters, spelling and reading as well as remembering things and communicating by talking and writing.

Play as Active Learning. This view of active learning builds upon children's natural inclination to explore their world through play. One assumption is that children choose to play games combining the use of intelligence and strategy. This is to be expected because the young of all civilizations generally incorporate into their play the skills they perceive as important in adulthood. Four important categories within this approach to active learning include puzzles, games of chance, games of strategy (e.g., simulations), and aesthetic games (e.g., role play, creative dramatics).

Academic Tasks as Active Learning. Activities within this category are often associated with typical classroom practice. Examples include letter writing, quizzes, math and science problems, drawing and coloring, work sheets, laboratories. Although some teachers argue that these academic tasks can provide for active learning, other educators caution that these can become academic rituals that encourages passive learning.

Experiential Activities as Active Learning. The intent of this approach to active learning is to help children relate academic subject to the world outside the classroom. Often these activities expect students to use knowledge and skills from several subject areas. Examples include projects, field trips, oral histories, case studies, research, creative performances (e.g., drama, music, dance), individual art (e.g., painting, drawing, sculpture), and original writing (e.g., poetry, stories and personal narrative).

In each of the preceding categories, "activity" is the central concept that defines active learning. This focus on "activity," offers teachers a way of quickly incorporating ideas into the classroom. Given the relentless demands of daily schooling, this expediency is seen as both valuable and practical.

Although this "what works" approach has a certain appeal, there is a danger that the activities can become ends in themselves. If this occurs, it can disconnect teachers from the underlying

¹The data includes an analysis of 198 abstracts from a University of Pittsburgh periodical index using the key search term, "active learning."

educative purpose that the activities were intended to serve. It can also disconnect students from the meaning of their classroom efforts.

Often it is assumed that a well planned activity will result in active learning for all students. It is important to remind ourselves that any given school activity can be meaningful and engaging for some students, while other students may see the same activity as school ritual. Therefore, it is important to consider the second question--i.e., why is the concept of active learning pedagogically important?

RATIONALE FOR ACTIVE LEARNING

Two streams of discourse provide the rationale for the pedagogical importance of active learning. One focuses on pedagogy as individual learning; the other focuses on pedagogy as human interaction in groups.

Pedagogy as Individual Learning. Concern for education that is responsive to the unique capacities of individuals has a long history. A recent and useful body of research focuses on the notion of multiple intelligences. In *Frames of Mind*, Howard Gardner, an American psychologist, construes seven distinctive ways of knowing, which he refers to as multiple intelligences.

Logical/Mathematical. Sensitivity to, and capacity to discern, logical or numerical patterns; ability to handling long chains of reasoning.

Linguistic. Sensitivity to the sounds, rhythms, and meanings of words; sensitivity to the different functions of language.

Musical. Abilities to produce and appreciate rhythm, pitch, and timbre; appreciation of the forms of musical expressiveness.

Spatial. Capacities to perceive the visual-spatial world accurately and to perform transformations on one's initial perceptions.

Bodily-Kinesthetic. Abilities to control one's body movements and to handle objects skillfully.

Inter-personal. Capacities to discern and respond appropriately to the moods, temperaments, motivations, and desires of other people.

Intrapersonal. Access to one's own feelings and the ability to discriminate among them and draw upon them to guide behavior; knowledge of one's own strengths, weaknesses, desires, and intelligences.²

It is important to note that Gardner and others believe that there are probably many other intelligences that we have not been able to describe. However, Gardner's working definition of intelligence is:

An intelligence entails the ability to solve problems or fashion products that are of consequence in a particular cultural setting. The problem solving skill allows one to approach a situation in which a goal is to be obtained and to locate the appropriate route to that goal. The creation of a cultural product is crucial to capturing and

²Gardner, H. & Hatch, T. (Nov. 1989). Multiple intelligences go to school, Educational implications of the theory of multiple intelligences. Educational Researcher. 4 - 10.

transmitting knowledge or expression one's views or feelings. The problems to be solved range from creating the end to a story to anticipating a mating move in chess to repairing a quilt. Products range from scientific theories to musical composition to successful political campaigns.³

Three early childhood research projects indicate that even four and five year old children exhibit distinctive profiles of strengths and weaknesses in these various intelligences. David Lazear in writing about teaching for multiple intelligences reminds us:

The good news is that each of us has all of these intelligences (and probably many more), but not all of them are developed equally and thus we do not use them effectively. In fact, it is usually the case that one or two intelligences are stronger and more fully developed than the others. But this need not be a permanent condition. We have within ourselves the capacity to activate all of our intelligences. In doing so, extended worlds of sensing, feeling, and knowing are opened to us!⁴

In this view, active learning is seen as more than a collection of discrete activities. Good teachers use activities to awaken and enhance their students' capacity to know in many different ways. Emphasis is on involving students in solving problems or creating products of cultural significance. As Gardner suggests the creation of such cultural products is crucial to capturing and transmitting knowledge or expressing one's views or feelings.

Pedagogy as Human Interaction in Groups. In the previous section we have focused on a way to think about the differences in individual learning. We have suggested that when students are involved in classroom activities which are intended to foster active learning, it is important to note that students respond to activities in very different ways. Gardner's description of multiple intelligences, or ways of knowing, provides teachers with explanations for how individuals come to know their world through various learning proclivities. The framework can help teachers plan for *individual learning*. Yet it is also important to recognize that schooling and pedagogy are concerned with *human interaction in groups*. Educators bring students together so that they can learn in a particular way. They plan subject matter and create situations so that students can make meaning through the schooling experiences.

If, indeed, students learn in groups together, how is it then that they learn (make meaning) from their school experiences. Bruner (1994) has articulated four ways of making meaning through experience. These include:

Agency. The need for a student to take control of his/her mental activity, to be responsible for constructing knowledge, to make certain that what he or she does in school matters.

Reflection. The ability to look back to an experience and be able to draw significant ideas, insights, questions. Reflection means recalling events, reconstructing them in order to find their meanings, taking them inside the mind.

Collaboration. Actively working together by sharing the resources of the mix of human beings involved in teaching and learning. (Mind is inside the head, but it is also with others.) Knowledge is socially constructed through discourse.

³Gardner, H.. *Frames of Mind*.

⁴Lazear, D. G. (1992). *Teaching for Multiple Intelligences*. Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation..

Culture. The way of life and thought that we construct, negotiate, institutionalize and take for granted. It's what we assume is "reality." Culture provides a lens that we look through to make meaning from our experiences.

As teachers plan for their instruction, it is important for them to keep in mind Bruner's ideas about the ways in which students make meaning during classroom activities. Furthermore, if teachers are determined to plan for active learning, then it is also important to ask, "What are typical classroom scenarios and how is it possible to plan for active learning in each?" In order to address this issue, we will present four typical instructional scenarios which are basic to classroom pedagogy.⁵ They depict the teacher and students in four different and complimentary roles. It is important to note that, in addition to teaching subject matter, we teach pupils the "role of student" through the classroom activities. The scenarios help us to determine the scope of the student role (and how active learning is manifest), as well as that of the teacher. We will refer to these briefly. A summary of the scenarios appears at the end of the module. Each scenario describes a planning phase and classroom action, including what the teacher will likely be doing in each. The four scenarios are as follows:

TEACHING/LEARNING SCENARIOS

SCENARIO 1. INFORMATION GIVING SCENARIO: In this one the scenario reflects the role of teacher as being directly responsible for the subject matter. Information is directly presented to the student. Often called *direct teaching* or *didactic teaching*, or most commonly called *the lecture*, the teacher is primarily the imparter of information in some form.

Active Learning: It is generally assumed that in this scenario the students are primarily in a position for passive learning. It is the teacher who is responsible for the content. However, there are ways that a teacher can invite students to become active. The teacher may be giving information to a group of students, or reading a story. The teacher can ask students to "finish the story" by stopping the teacher's talk and saying to students, "You may take some time to talk with the person sitting next to you about the story. See if the two of you can come up with a finish." or, in the case of content, the teacher can ask the students to "discuss the information with your neighbor and ask one good question that comes to your mind." Note, if the teacher asks the class in general a question, there is no guarantee that each student will be thinking through the question. If, however, the teacher requests each student to stop and think and discuss the content and then report the discussion to the whole class, it provides the situation for active learning. Notice that in this way the teacher is providing for *reflection* and *collaboration*.

SCENARIO 2. LARGE GROUP ACTIVITIES: This scenario reflects teacher-directed instruction, concerned both with the content and the way in which students make meaning from the content. The teacher directs the activities (discussed earlier in the module) in a large group, and, generally, all participants are focused on the same subject matter. The role of teacher is as director of learning activities in a single group. Class discussion, role play, spelling games, math practices, etc. are examples of activities in which the teacher directs the action.

Active Learning: This scenario provides for more active learning since the activities themselves are planned in order to engage students in the subject matter. Teachers still need to be reminded that when they ask questions of the large group not all students will think about the question. It is therefore suggested (as in Scenario 1) that teachers direct all students into the activities in one way or another and provide for ways to have each student engaged in the learning experiences.

⁵Garman, Noreen. (1986). Reflection, the heart of clinical supervision: A modern rationale for professional practice. *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision*. 2:1, 1-24.

Note: The first two scenarios are teacher-directed in that the classroom activities are directly controlled and managed by the teacher during the class period. The third and fourth scenarios are student-centered in that the teacher has organized the activities before the class period and the students have heavy responsibility for ownership of the class action during the period. These two scenarios are deliberately planned with agency, reflection, collaboration, and culture, as the centerpiece of active learning.

SCENARIO 3. STUDENT CENTERED INSTRUCTION: In this scenario the subject matter might be the same or it might be different for each student (or group of students). However, the process of learning is managed individually or in small groups by the teacher's planning of learning tasks described to the student in student terms. The role of the teacher is as designer and manager of learning tasks.

Active learning: In this scenario it is common for teachers to plan for students to be in small groups (typically called "cooperative learning.") The teacher plans for the small groups to accomplish specific tasks together, such as math problems, discussions about literature, etc. It may be that each group does the same task, or each group may do different tasks. If groups do different tasks that are related to a larger unit, the class is called "jigsaw class" since each group may have a piece of a larger picture that the teacher wants them to learn. At some point each group reports their accomplishments to the whole class.

SCENARIO 4. LEARNING HOW TO LEARN. This is perhaps the hardest scenario to pull off, but perhaps the most crucial. The scenario reflects the teacher as designing and managing a structure in which students learn how to learn about the subject matter. The teacher's role is to help students plan for their learning, carry out their plans and evaluate their progress as it unfolds. The scenario is most recognizable when students are doing projects, such as research. And, of course, this is the scenario used most often in laboratory and computer classes. One aspect is known as "project-based" or "problem-based" learning.

Active Learning: Teachers are often reluctant to give up the control of their direct instruction in order to allow students to plan and carry out their learning experiences. It is important to note that this scenario provides for agency, reflection, collaboration and culture to be at the center of the activities. Even young children can engage in learning how to learn. They can plan for dramatic presentations, for a debate, for research. Young children can plan for class rituals such as spelling tests and math practice if they are asked to form committees in order to do so. This scenario takes careful planning on the part of the teacher.

We are often asked if there are any one of these scenarios that are "better" than another one for students. Educators might disagree about the emphasis that teachers put on each. (For instance, to use Scenario 1 continually might encourage passive learning in students.) We hope that students have the opportunity to learn in all four scenarios when they are appropriate for the situations. There is good teaching and poor teaching associated with each one of the four scenarios. It is a good teacher who can plan for learning activities, be able to say why the activities are educative, and engage students in the instructional scenario best suited for the purpose intended. Good teachers engage students for the use of mind and heart.

Summary. Teachers who continue to carry out their duties during times of crisis are faced with overwhelming challenges. Traditional schools no longer provide organizational stability. Students and teachers both are experiencing chaotic, often devastating, situations in their lives. Teachers are called upon to be *schoolmakers*, to think beyond their traditional ideas of schooling. In times of social crisis it is crucial to examine the purposes of schooling. We have suggested that *school as distraction* and *school as haven* are two potential purposes of schooling. In the future, however, the community must look toward *school as rebuilding culture*. To compound the challenge, teachers are being asked to consider the concept of *active learning* in their duties of schoolmaking. We have suggested that in the educational literature active learning is most often communicated through the "what works" of classroom activities. We have attempted to describe the range of activities associated

with the concept of active learning. We have also cautioned that, although the "what works" activities are most appealing to the immediate needs of the teachers, there is a danger that the activities can become ends in themselves. Without an understanding of the underlying reason for the activity (call it a local theory if you will), the activity can become disconnected from the educative purpose that the activities were intended to serve. We have briefly discussed pedagogy for individual learning (multiple intelligences) and pedagogy for human interaction in groups (agency, reflection, collaboration and culture) as examples of underlying purposes for active learning. Finally, we described four typical classroom scenarios from which teachers can plan for active learning as pedagogy.

We end our module as we began, with a humble realization that we cannot truly comprehend the conditions under which you are living, yet we recognize that we share the concern, the responsibility for educating children. The words of philosopher Hannah Arendt seem to say it with soul:

Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it, and by the same token, save it from ruin, which, except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and the young, would be inevitable. And education, too, is where we decide whether we love our children enough not to expel them from our world and leave them to their own devices, nor to strike from their hands their chance of undertaking something new, something unforeseen by us, but to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing a common world.(6)

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REFLECTIVE WRITING ASSIGNMENT

What does “active learning” mean in your experience as an educator? (As you respond to this question, take into consideration your experiences as an educator, your experiences in today’s workshop, and the ideas generated by the essay and your discussions with colleagues.)

THEORETIC EXPLANATIONS

Session 1

Title of Activity: Welcome and Introduction to Workshop

Type of Activity: Presentation to All Workshop Participants

The concept of “involvement” is central to active learning. By knowing in advance the plan for the day, individuals gain a big picture or map of the anticipated events. Having such a map can help to allay participant anxiety by letting them know what to expect. In addition, it helps participants pace themselves throughout the day.

Because active learning is inductive, it is impossible for the leader to know exactly when participants will have an insight or question that they want to discuss. Although it is ideal for the leader to respond to participant comments as they arise, this can become disruptive if one or two participants begin to dominate the discussion. By laying out the plan for the day, participants can see where their

concerns will be addressed. This allows them to be more selective about when to share their comments. It also gives the leader more flexibility in guiding the flow of the discussion.

Session 2

Title of Activity: Forming Work Groups
Type of Activity: Small Group Discussion

An important aspect of active learning is the interaction among participants in the learning situation. The quality of the learning is dependent, in part, on the level of comfort that participants feel toward each other. Therefore, this initial Getting Acquainted activity serves two purposes. First, it lets participants know that they are expected to be actively involved in the experience. They will not be sitting passively, receiving information from the workshop leader. Second, as participants develop a sense of personal connection with at least a few other people, they begin to feel comfortable with each other and more willing to enter into subsequent workshop activities.

Generally, it helps to start the process if the workshop leader introduces himself/herself to the group. This should be a reasonably brief statement, not focusing on the leader's professional credentials, but more on his/her interest in the content of the workshop. If the workshop leader places too much emphasis on title and credentials, it is likely to set a hierarchical and competitive tone for the workshop.

Session 3

Title of Activity: What Do We Mean by Active Learning?
Type of Activity: Individual Reading and Discussion in Work Groups

This activity is designed to illustrate several principles of active learning.

(1) Learners take an active role in the acquisition of information. By asking participants to read an informational essay, the workshop leader moves out of the role of disseminator of information. Rather than being passive recipients of the teachers' ideas, participants are expected to gain information in a more active manner by interacting directly with a text.

(2) The concept of intellectual engagement is central to active learning. Asking participants to identify three ideas that they want to discuss encourages their engagement with the text. It shifts responsibility to the learner for connecting with the ideas and setting the agenda for the discussion. This reinforces the idea that in active learning, learners are responsible for thinking critically about information rather than waiting passively for the teacher/expert to tell them what is important.

There is nothing special about asking participants to identify three ideas. That number seems to encourage participants to sustain their attention to the text, and at the same time, it is not an overwhelming expectation. Workshop leaders should not be surprised when some students identify more than three ideas and some identify fewer. A variation of this exercise is to ask participants to identify an idea that they found most meaningful or intriguing. This can help to make the subsequent discussion a little more manageable in terms of time. However, individuals who are not familiar with active learning may be intimidated, believing that they must identify **THE** idea that the teacher considers to be most important. Or, they may worry that the idea they identify is not as "good" or "important" as the ideas identified by other participants. Once learners become more experienced with active learning, this variation can be useful.

(3) The concept of agency is also central in active learning. When the workshop leader invites participants to share their reactions to the text, he or she encourages participants to become agents in their own learning. The starting point for the discussion is determined by ideas that are important to

the participants, rather than the teacher. This, too, fosters a sense of agency. At the same time, it provides the teacher with insight into the learners' thinking about a topic.

(4) Active learning encourages multiple perspectives by creating space for multiple voices. Initiating the group discussion is a crucial step in this activity. Having participants discuss in small, rather than large, groups serves several purposes. First, it is less likely that the workshop leader or teacher will "take over" the discussion. Second, participants are likely to feel more compelled to speak, because their silence would be more noticeable. At the same time, they are likely to feel more comfortable about sharing their ideas. Third, small groups give participants more time to explore ideas in greater depth and it is the participants, rather than the teacher, who must question, probe, challenge, and extend the ideas.

(5) The social construction of knowledge is central to active learning. For this segment of the workshop, participants have been divided into working groups. This initial discussion creates an intellectual context for the work the participants are expected to complete during the afternoon session. (See discussion of think groups and work groups in the introductory section of this guide.)

(6) In this and other sessions of the workshop, the leader is called upon to function as a facilitator of active learning. The role of facilitator embodies several issues. One is beliefs about knowledge and the ways in which people come to know. Another is creating conditions for active learning. A third is enacting a set of behaviors that support active learning among participants. It is important to note that the role of lecturer is based on the belief that formal knowledge is transmitted and received. Whereas the facilitator role assumes that knowledge is socially constructed (see essay).

Within this context, workshop leaders must decide what they will do when participants are meeting in Work and Think Groups. Workshop Leaders who do not subscribe to the epistemological assumptions of active learning may tend to hover over the groups, trying to control both the substance and the process of their discussions. On the other hand, leaders who are trying to empower learners may choose to remain apart from the groups. This might inadvertently create the appearance of leader disinterest. Finding a middle ground is part of the art of serving as a facilitator of active learning.

Title of Activity: Lunch Break
Type of Activity: Social or Reflective Time

In planning the workshop, leaders should consider both practical and educative issues related to meals. At the practical level is the issue of cost and whether money is available to provide lunch for all participants or whether participants are expected to cover this cost individually. Beyond this, the workshop leader should consider the ways in which sharing meal times can contribute to the educational intent of the workshop.

As a minimum, workshop participants often enjoy the opportunity to talk informally during lunch. Some individuals choose to continue discussing ideas generated during workshop sessions. Others may have a sense of connection with one or more individuals and want to establish a stronger relationship by talking about mutual ideas or concerns. Often workshop participants use lunch conversations to exchange information about problems or resources related to their practice setting. The long-term value of such networking should not be underestimated. By including a group lunch in the workshop, the leader can support and encourage these professional connections.

Conversely, when individuals have been engaged in intensive working sessions, they may want some quiet time to be alone, to reflect or to relax.

There is no right or wrong approach. The issue is flagged here so that workshop leaders can consider what best supports the type of learning environment they want to create.

Session 4

Title of Activity: Designing Active Learning Activities in Work Groups
Type of Activity: Work Session and Work Group Report to all workshop participants

During the morning session, the small groups were asked to function as a **think group**. During this session, the group is asked to function as a **work group**. Both types of groups play an important role in active learning.

During the think group discussion, it is not necessary or even desirable, to reach consensus. As mentioned above, the purpose is to give voice to multiple perspectives. When the group shifts to a work mode, members will need to reach agreement on what type of activity to design. The multiple perspectives represented by the individual members do not have to be reconciled, but rather can be used to enrich the group's problem solving and decision making.

Several issues are embedded in having the small groups report to the whole group. One is the issue of accountability; in other words, when individuals know they must report to their peers, they have an incentive to remain focused on the task and to bring it to completion. Reporting in the large group also allows everyone to see a broader range of possibilities for incorporating active learning activities into instruction. In addition, it helps to counteract the notion that there is one right way to approach a task or one right outcome from an active learning project. Inevitably, groups take different approaches to the task and generate a variety of very creative products.

The wrap up portion of the afternoon session gives the workshop leader an opportunity to summarize key ideas that emerged from the work of the groups as well as to elicit questions that are of concern to the participants. This helps to provide a sense of closure to the day's experience.

Session 5

Title of Activity: Reflections on Active Learning
Type of Activity: Individual Writing Assignment

What Do We Mean By Reflection?

In the early 1980s, the concept of reflection regained importance in the language of education, as educators revisited the relationship of reflection to learning. Donald Schon's *The Reflective Practitioner* (1983) has become a seminal piece in educational discourse. Schon derives his ideas from John Dewey's work, in particular his notion of "education as reconstruction" (in *Democracy and Education, 1916*). Dewey suggests that experience is the context from which learning emerges, but it is really in the reconstruction of experience that this happens. As he points out,

...the ideal of growth results in the conception that education is a constant reorganizing or reconstructing of experience. It has all the time an immediate end, and so far as activity is educative, it reaches that end--the direct transformation of the quality of experience. Infancy, youth, adult life---all stand on the same educative level in the sense that what is really *learned* at any and every stage of experience constitutes the value of that experience, and in the sense that it is the chief business of life at every point to make living thus contribute to an enrichment of its own perceptible meaning (p.76).

Thus, Dewey's definition of education is that "reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience" is indeed at the heart of the educative act.

In the current rhetoric and practices regarding reflection there are various interpretations which range from the very trivial and superficial to the deeply profound. The range of interpretations of what it means to "reflect on one's experience" include recollection of experience, introspection on the experience as well as deriving conceptual understandings from experience.

Reflection as recollection: In this form of reflection a person recalls the details of the events and describes what has happened. In other words this interpretation of reflection is a matter of *giving an account of* the events of the experience. Recollection can be used for purposes of documentation of events, however, recollection can also become a manifestation of an *aesthetic portrayal of experience* (through stories, poems, drama, etc.)

Reflection as introspection: In this form of reflection a person begins to look within, to examine one's mental and emotional processes. (Initially it is common to want to seek an explanation for one's actions as a part of the introspection.) Introspection is often thought of as *accounting for* what has happened." Introspection begins to get at the articulation of the *meaning* that one makes of the experience.

Conceptual reflection In this form of reflection one is seeking the conceptual understandings for the experience. It is a form of theorizing. The participant is searching for ideas and insights which are often expressed as *issues or concepts* in order to articulate the embedded meanings of the events.

Some brief comments on the meaning of *experience*: In the discourse regarding the meaning of experience there are some common themes. Experience is often referred to as "a particular instance of personally encountering something." It is assumed that engaging in a particular event means listening, encountering and understanding and thus "experiencing" the events of our lives. Experience is associated with knowledge and wisdom, that is, making thoughtful and productive meaning from the encounters.

Note: If there is a relatively small number of participants in the workshop (12 - 15 individuals), less time may be needed for the small group reports and the leader may want to include time for reflective writing during the afternoon workshop.

Session 7

Title of Activity: Sharing Individual Reflective Writing
Type of Activity: Think Group Discussion

The diadic learning (in groups of two) allows participants to experience another configuration of group activity. Hopefully, they will begin to notice the difference in dynamics that occurs as the size of the groups varies.

The second day begins with a discussion in diads for several reasons. Often participants find it difficult to “get started” on the second day of a workshop. They have expended energy on day 1 and then experienced a let down as they relaxed over night. Working in pairs allows participants to ease back into a work mode. Another possibility is that individuals will have thought about the ideas and experiences of the preceding day and want to share their thoughts with others. By having participants work in pairs, they have a greater opportunity to express themselves. Although writing for oneself can be extremely important,⁶ it is also important to have an audience for one’s writing and a response to one’s ideas. Because making one’s private ideas public can be intimidating, having a small initial audience and an opportunity to elaborate on one’s writings can be helpful.

Having participants move from their dyads to the larger configuration of the think group allows for a sharing of multiple perspectives that is so crucial to active learning.

The leader might want to listen in on the discussions and make note of the types of reflection that are exhibited in the participants’ writings and comments.

Session 8

Title of Activity: Active Learning--Different Roles for Teachers and Learners
Type of Activity: Individual Reading and Think Group Discussion

Individual Reading Activity. Active learning entails a cyclical process in which learners are asked to engage in an experience, reflect on that experience, and share their reflections. The process of sharing through discussion often helps individuals to clarify their ideas and to broaden and deepen their thinking as they hear the views of others. To stimulate another cycle of thinking, it is useful to introduce additional information for the learners to consider. Having students revisit the informative essay they read on day 1 of the workshop and focus more specifically on particular ideas, challenges the participants to re-examine their emerging ideas.

Think Group Discussion. This activity demonstrates the pedagogical dimensions mentioned in the essay--i.e., agency, reflection, collaboration and culture. The first three pedagogical dimensions have been addressed in other sections of this Leader’s Guide; therefore, a few words about the dimension of culture are worth adding here. The suggested discussion questions ask the workshop participants to consider the culture of the setting within which they teach. This helps participants make meaning of the theoretic information by connecting it to the realities of their own experience.

Please note that the discussion questions listed in the directions above are **suggestions**. The Workshop Leader may want to introduce one or two of the questions as a way of initiating and focusing the think group discussion. Choosing among the questions may be guided by the Leader’s sense of the

⁶For more information, see the module on journal writing that is part of this active learning series.

participants' thinking about active learning. Or the leader might list the questions and let each group decide where to start their discussion. Neither the leader nor the participants should expect to cover all the questions in the course of their discussion.

Please note that the Individual Reflection activity is an option for concluding this session. The Leader should use his/her judgment to decide whether it is more productive for the groups to continue their discussion or to take a break and reflect on the meanings they have gained from the exchange of ideas and points of view. If the Leader decides to use this activity, it will take about 25 minutes--5 for the individual reflection and writing; and 20 for members to share their writing with each other. It is possible that the group will be tempted to continue their earlier discussion as the individual writings are read. To avoid this the Leader can suggest that this part of the session be conducted as a "go around." A "go around" is a group discussion technique in which each member makes a brief statement that summarizes their thinking or feelings. Comments are held until all members have had a chance to make their statement.

At the end of this session, review with participants whatever arrangements have been made for lunch and what time they are expected to reconvene.

Session 9

Title of Activity: Refining Active Learning Activities
Type of Activity: Work Session (continued from Day 1)

The principle of active learning demonstrated in this work session is that knowledge is socially constructed. Through their engagement with the ideas of the workshop and with their peers, participants have collaboratively generated new intellectual products. One hallmark of successful active learning is the creation of products that are useful to the learner and may be useful to others as well.

Session 10

Title of Activity: Workshop Conclusion
Type of Activity: Discussion with all workshop participants

Often by this time in a workshop, participants are exhausted from their intellectual endeavors. There can be a temptation for the group to disperse. It is important, however, for the members to come together one last time to gain a sense of closure. The Workshop Leader can use their discretion to decide how much time and emphasis to give to this concluding activity. Sixty minutes is suggested to give each group a chance to report on their accomplishments. This builds in accountability as well as satisfying the need for recognition of their efforts.

Because active learning is an inductive process, this session provides the Workshop Leader with time to draw attention to concepts and principles of active learning that the group has experienced. Whenever possible, the leader should use examples of comments, actions, insights from the participants to illustrate and reinforce the theoretical underpinnings of active learning. In doing this, the Workshop Leader models a different role for teachers. Rather than dispensing pre-existing knowledge, she or he connects the experiences and insights of the group to broader concepts and principles and in so doing reinforces and affirms the meaning making nature of active learning.