

White Paper

Active Learning in the Classroom: Using E-Books



ACTIVE LEARNING IN THE CLASSROOM: USING E-BOOKS

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We are in an era of health care education that is saturated with technology. The millennial generation of students that occupies so much of our classroom today has technology infused into nearly every aspect of their lives. In light of this, it seems prudent that technology be used and incorporated into the classroom. Technology integration into higher education has been an area of much discussion in recent years. National accrediting bodies, as well as major stakeholders, are interested in the effectiveness of both integration methods and products (Javeri & Persichitte, 2007). Health care science programs should incorporate electronic textbooks (ebooks) into their curriculum and educate students as they prepare to graduate (Cibulka & Crane-Wilder, 2011).

Active Learning

Active learning is central to engaging the learner and validating what they have integrated into their knowledge base. We are no longer in an era of the “traditional lecture;” learners today expect active engagement. Educators are not seen as the “leaders” of the class, but rather as facilitators of continued learning. Using diversified strategies can address varied learning styles, as well as optimize retention of information for the student (Boctor, 2013).

Many forms of active learning can be used within education. Games have the potential to be an effective and innovative teaching strategy (Boctor, 2013). The “flipped classroom” is centered on active learning strategies in the classroom. Using this method, students prepare outside of class by reading material and possibly listening to prerecorded lectures. The class time is then used for active learning methods to validate learning, as well as clarify any questions they may have (Boctor, 2013).

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Active learning strategies in the classroom allow more engagement between the learner and the instructor. Active learning is described as an overarching term for pedagogies that focus on student activity and student engagement in the learning process (Prince, 2004). The millennial generation has become a significant change agent for teaching methods in education across the board. For that reason, educators must rise to the occasion and adapt their teaching methods to create a more learner-centered environment.

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EBooks

In my experience as an educator, ebooks provide an educational journey for the student. The textbook now becomes a very personalized learning tool with which the student can interact. Gone are the days of carrying five to six textbooks of significant weight to the classroom or clinical setting. Students are now carrying the same books in ebook format on their portable tablets and ereaders.

For years, student would compartmentalize their learning, assigning themselves to one book for each class and reading nothing beyond that text for that class. With the use of ebooks, students now realize the importance and benefit of using multiple titles for all of their classes. Students have the ability to complete a comprehensive search across multiple titles

with a swipe of their finger, finally giving them that holistic look at information related to their patients. Faculty can incorporate current, evidence-based research articles or practice care guidelines directly into the students' textbooks. Faculty also has the ability to share highlighted information or pose questions highlighting key concepts within the students' assigned readings.

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Implementation Basics

The question from many educators then becomes, "How do I use ebooks in the classroom?" The answer is: anyway an educator can imagine. There are so many current methods with new innovations being developed each day in the use of ebooks in the classroom. Educators can select activities based on their comfort level with technology and the learning level of their students.

The simplest way educators can use ebooks is to share highlights in the text with students. The amount of highlight should be at the faculty discretion, but my preference is to highlight only section headers. I impress upon the students that this creates a "roadmap" for them through their text. While they have to read and study those sections, the highlights provide a point of focus. Educators can also export these highlights to create lecture outlines.

Within Pageburst eBooks from health science publisher Elsevier, "sticky notes" are a very versatile option. Faculty can use this function in a section of the text to pose study questions for the student or to include links to websites or research articles — the possibilities are endless. I encourage faculty to use the "sticky notes" for practice questions. These questions can be part of the student's preparation for class. During class time, all the questions posed as part of the reading become the active learning strategy. For example, faculty can use these questions as a group discussion, which will highlight the right answer and the rationale for that answer.

A simple activity that helps faculty "get their feet wet" using ebooks is what I have called "brain breaks." The faculty identifies concepts that students typically struggle with semester after semester to present during a class period. These concepts may either be printed on a piece of paper and handed out as the students walk in, or emailed ahead of time to keep the class paperless. Periodically through the class period, the faculty will have a "brain break" in their lecture. Students take this time to search their ebook collection for information related to the concept they have been given. This allows the group to have an open forum for discussion, as well as allowing the faculty to assess students' comprehension and determine if moving forward with more content is appropriate.

Conclusion

Ebooks open so many possibilities for students both in and outside the classroom. Mandates from national accrediting agencies suggest that health sciences schools must prepare students to effectively practice in highly technological and sophisticated health care environments (Doswell, Braxter, Dabbs, Nilsen & Klem, 2013). We should not expect less of ourselves than we do of our students in that regard. Ebooks are a perfect place for faculty to begin increasing their comfort level with necessary technologies in order to meet the needs of their students.

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