

ARTICLE REVIEWED

Engaging Students in Large Health Classes With Active Learning Strategies

Elliot, S., Combs, S., Huelskamp, A., & Hritz, N. (2017). Engaging students in large health classes with active learning strategies. *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance*, 88(6), 38-43.

THE PROBLEM:

Budget cuts are inevitable in K-12 education — especially when it comes to health and physical education — and often equate to larger class sizes. This creates further problems in the classroom with regard to retention, teaching effectiveness and learning.

One way to overcome the challenge of teaching larger class sizes is to incorporate and promote active learning. This type of learning puts the student at the center and enables them to think critically, work with others, and apply their knowledge to different contexts. This article discussed active learning strategies in health classes of 30 or more students.



Research Summary:

Increased class sizes are linked to detrimental outcomes, including: a) teacher-centered teaching; b) less student involvement; c) minimal teacher-student interaction; and d) little critical-thinking engagement. With health classes containing approximately 50 or more students, health educators are at their wit's end when it comes to incorporating new, creative ideas in their larger-size classrooms. However, research has pointed out the potential of active learning in larger-size classrooms. Active learning helps to engage all students and decrease off-task behavior by utilizing teaching and learning strategies that focus on active engagement throughout the lesson. Students are more likely to solve problems and think critically in this type of environment. Active learning strategies can be used at various stages, such as on the first day of class, in the beginning of the class period, during class, and at the end of class.

Conclusion:

The more positive the learning environment, the more likely students are to be motivated. It is important for the teacher to be enthusiastic and participate in active learning scenarios; by doing this, students are more likely to participate. Creating an environment where students can practice their autonomy and self-efficacy is key throughout the active learning process. This isn't to say there won't be challenges down the road — there may very well be. However, to improve as an educator, one must step outside their comfort zone from time to time.

Key Takeaway:

One active learning strategy that can take place on the first day of class is called "kite." In this activity, students draw a kite with four quadrants on a piece of paper and within each quadrant, draw their response to four health-related questions. Students then explain their kite to one another and, in the end, hang it up around the classroom. At the start of class, the health educator can provide students with a prompt and ask them to write any questions they may have as it relates to the prompt. After this brainstorming takes place, students can then participate in a think-pair-share activity where they communicate with classmates to spark discussion and alleviate any confusion on the topic. An active learning strategy that could take place at the end of class might include having students bring notecards to class and use those notecards to write down a response to a question or reflect on the lesson. This idea is also known as an exit slip. All in all, there are multiple active learning strategies that health educators can incorporate into their larger class sizes.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- Skills-based [learning activities](#)
- [EdGames](#) – This website is an excellent resource that provides health educators with whole-class participation games and ideas.