Appreciative
Active Learning

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Appreciative Active Learning

Active learning strategies are an engaging alternative to traditional lecture teaching methods (Bonwell & Eison, 1991; Freeman et al., 2014; Gleason et al., 2011; Prince, 2004). However, one of the potential barriers to implementing active learning strategies is the lack of explicit direction and training about how to deliver them effectively (Gleason et al., 2011). Fortunately, Appreciative Advising offers a theory-to-practice framework for selecting and delivering well-known active learning strategies. The purpose of this paper is to define active learning and provide an Appreciative framework for implementing active learning strategies that incorporates the pedagogy of visible thinking. Figure 1 shows how Appreciative Active Learning is tied to Appreciative Advising, active learning, and the pedagogy outlined in Making Thinking Visible.
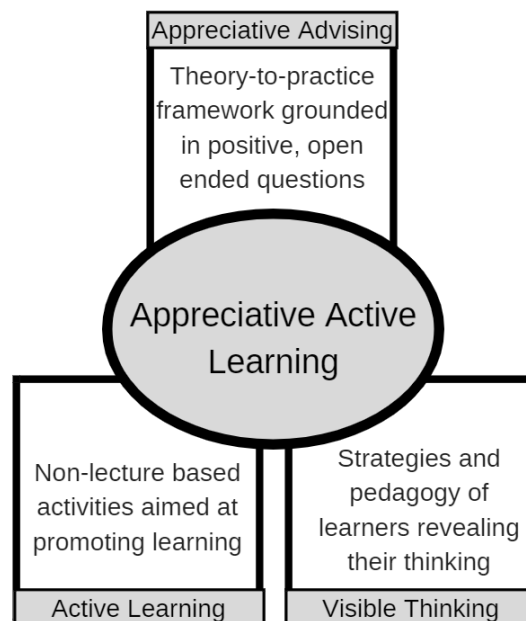

Figure 1. Appreciative Active Learning.

Framing Appreciative Active Learning

Appreciative Active Learning offers intentional reflection for the facilitator and encourages the production of proactive solutions to challenges that may arise during implementation. Active learning strategies are part of the foundation of Appreciative Active Learning. Active learning is, "anything that involves students in doing things and thinking about the things they are doing" (Bonwell & Eison, 1991, p. 19). Active learning strategies are important because studies, "…indicate that active learning increases examination performance…and that lecturing increases failure rates by 55%" (Freeman et al., 2014, p. 8412). However, often active learning strategies are shared with a general description and sparse examples of facilitator or learner inputs or outcomes. When challenges arise, any well-intentioned facilitator may revert to traditional lecture-based practices as opposed to asking reflective questions to support active learning.

Active learning offers engaging opportunities for learners to interact with information to develop new understandings and connections (Michael, 2006). Engaging learners in active learning allows for the construction of meaning and collaborative learning opportunities. As Grabinger and Dunlap (1995) share in their discussion of rich environments for active learning, "students become investigators, seekers, and problem solvers" (p. 19). Without challenging learners with active learning opportunities, facilitators are dismissing opportunities to incorporate evidence-based practices of engagement and learning.

To prepare for utilizing an active learning strategy, a facilitator must have a firm understanding of the process and goal of the strategy. *Making Thinking Visible* by Ritchhart, Church, and Morrison (2011) offers a detailed outline of numerous active learning strategies in addition to the intentions behind each strategy. Ritchhart, Church, and Morrison (2011) offer a powerful guide for Appreciative Active Learning in *Making Thinking Visible* because, "rather than a set of fixed lessons, Visible Thinking is a varied collection of practices, including thinking routines (small sets of questions or a short sequence of steps) as well as the documentation of student thinking" ("Visible Thinking"). *Making Thinking Visible* (Ritchhart, Church, & Morrison, 2011) offers insight into when and why to implement unique strategies because, "…we all know that the reality of most schools and classrooms is quite different" (Ritchhart, Church, & Morrison, 2011, p. 8). Once an active learning strategy process is solidified for a facilitator, Ritchhart, Church, and Morrison (2011) take the time to outline outcomes for learners. Appreciative Active Learning aligns with the outcomes provided in *Making Thinking Visible* (Ritchhart, Church, & Morrison, 2011) while providing Appreciative support for facilitators and learners. Appreciative Active Learning embraces learning for understanding as opposed to providing additional strategies for merely delivering content in a creative way.

The Appreciative Advising framework provides a bridge between an active learning strategy and the visible thinking pedagogy by engaging facilitator and learner alike. The Appreciative Advising framework focuses on the, "…intentional collaborative practice of asking positive, open-ended questions that help…students optimize their educational experiences and achieve their dreams, goals, and potentials" (Bloom & Martin, 2002). Appreciative Advising is a six-phase framework: Disarm, Discover, Dream, Design, Deliver, and Don't Settle (Bloom, Hutson, & He, 2008) that Appreciative Active Learning utilizes to outline the interactions between facilitator and learner. Appreciative Active Learning, as outlined below, aligns active learning strategies with three of the six phases of Appreciative Advising to serve as a guide for topic exploration in the classroom.

While Appreciative Advising offers guidance for exploration in the classroom, an Appreciative mindset of the facilitator will offer insight into the questions and relationships with learners. As Bloom, Hutson, He, and Konkle (2013) state, "the appreciative mindset plays heavily into creating positive interactions with others" (p. 7). Implementing an Appreciative mindset in teaching will encourage the evolution of a facilitator's pedagogy from passive to active learning and inform planning and practice. In *Appreciative College Instruction*, Bloom, Hutson, He, and Robinson (2011) share that an instructor with an appreciative mindset utilizing active learning strategies can, "…make curricular content engaging for students, regardless of topic" (p. 119). While Bloom, Hutson, He, and Robinson (2011) provide a template for lesson plan structure, and additional active learning strategies and questions, Appreciative Active Learning is aimed at developing a structure for intentionally implementing individual active learning strategies.

Defining Appreciative Active Learning

Applying an Appreciative lens to active learning allows the facilitator to intentionally prepare for learning and provide positive support and feedback for implementation. The effective implementation of Appreciative Active Learning will require proactive investment from the facilitator. Appreciative Active Learning is a guide for the preparation and implementation of active learning strategies with an appreciative mindset alongside a strong understanding of needed facilitator inputs and intended learner outcomes. The facilitator of Appreciative Active Learning will recognize and embrace the planning and practice required to encourage positive outcomes. Learners will become the driving force behind content exploration and the facilitator will offer guidance, support, and encouragement with consistent, positive questioning. The flexibility to navigate individual concerns through questions without needing the attention of all learners in the room is an important asset to Appreciative Active Learning strategies.

Implementing Appreciative Active Learning

A guided example of an Appreciative Active Learning activity will highlight the development and process of implementing this practice. The following Compass Points activity is shared in *Making Thinking Visible* (Ritchhart, Church, & Morrison, 2011). The questions provided are examples of the reflection that is encouraged in order to best implement an Appreciative Active Learning activity. After providing descriptive information about an active learning strategy in part 1 (Figure 2), the facilitator will prepare for the strategy by first identifying and elaborating on the intended outcomes. Here the purpose is to discover what learners already know about the topic and what they look forward to learning in the next lesson or unit.

Appreciative Active Learning Part 1
> **Active Learning Strategy**: Compass points
> **Brief Description**: N, E, S, W - letters marked clearly around the room. During the activity, learners write on large sheets of paper, whiteboards, or sticky notes to answer the appropriate questions at each compass point. A second round offers a chance for learners to see what others wrote.
> **Appreciative Advising Phase**: Discover
> **Purpose**: Used to Discover the current understanding and needs of each learner.

Figure 2. Appreciative Active Learning Part 1.

In part 2 (Figure 3), the facilitator then answers questions that ensure the strategy is appropriate for the identified outcomes and the written answers will serve as reminders during implementation. To finish preparing for the strategy, the facilitator will identify the space requirements, including supplies needed, to effectively Disarm students and create an environment necessary for success. For Compass Points, the space needed is to post the cardinal directions around the room that are accessible for all students and will accommodate a group of students at each station. Once preparations are complete, the facilitator will outline how the strategy will be introduced and shared with learners.

Appreciative Active Learning Part 2

Prepare for strategy

Intended outcome:
Discover what learners already know about the topic and what they look forward to learning in the next lesson or unit.

Questions for facilitator
What will learners already know?
How will learner-shared information impact your practice?
How will you encourage learners who are unsure?
How will you encourage learners who need additional challenge?

Space requirements (Disarm)
Where will the Compass Points be placed to be accessible by everyone?
How will anonymous input be shared?

Figure 3. Appreciative Active Learning Part 2.

In part 3 (Figure 4), the introduction will be a time to describe for learners what content the Compass Points activity will focus on as well as a description of each Compass Point station. If possible, these descriptions should also be available at each point or on display in a central location as a reminder. During the introduction, it is imperative that the facilitator provide an overview, expectations, and intended outcomes for learners to engage. The detailed strategy outline will allow the facilitator to have written instructions and adjustments to refer to.

Appreciative Active Learning Part 3

Implement strategy

Introduction Overview of activity and intended outcomes
Compass points will be an opportunity for us to all share what we know and have questions about _____. I will use the responses provided to guide our lessons in the coming days/weeks.

Strategy (Adapted from *Making Thinking Visible*)
N = Name details: What do you know about this topic?
E = Excited: What excites you about this idea or topic?
S = Suggestion for Moving Forward: How might you move forward with this idea or topic? Where do you think it will apply?
W = Wonder: What questions do you have about this topic?
Learners will rotate once to write their thoughts anonymously and a second time to observe what others have written. Learners return to individually write final thoughts on each compass point that will be turned in.

Figure 4. Appreciative Active Learning Part 3.

Once the activity is complete, and the learners have completed their reflection items, the facilitator will turn to part 4 (Figure 5) to reflect on preparation and outcomes. For Compass Points, the facilitator will reflect and plan for how the information shared from learners will impact future practice. This space will also allow facilitators to have physical notes to refer to and adjust from.

Appreciative Active Learning Part 4

Facilitator reflection

You have now Discovered how your learners are or are not prepared for the information you will be moving into.

How will you readjust and cover material?

What additional information should be included?

What actions/outcomes will respect the concerns and needs of learners?

Figure 5. Appreciative Active Learning Part 4.

The questions used in each part of the Appreciative Active Learning framework highlight the reflective intentions of Appreciative Active Learning and serve as an initial repository for a facilitator completing an outline. Appendix A provides a working template to be completed by a facilitator to transform any active learning strategy into an Appreciative Active Learning activity through positive, open ended questions. Appendices B and C provide additional Appreciative Active Learning strategies focused on a phase of Appreciative Advising with room to be printed and completed by the facilitator. The purpose of pairing each strategy with a phase is to highlight the versatility of the Appreciative Advising framework as well as the diverse applications of active learning strategies. Ultimately, the goal is for an Appreciative Active Learning strategy to promote positive learning opportunities and inform an Appreciative teaching pedagogy.

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Appendix A

1. <u>Active Learning Strategy:</u>

    Brief Description:

    Purpose:

2. <u>Prepare for strategy</u>

    Intended outcome

    Questions for facilitator

    Space requirements (Disarm)

3. <u>Implement strategy</u>

    Introduction - Overview of activity and intended outcomes to share with learners

    Strategy - Detailed outline of learning strategy

4. <u>Facilitator reflection</u> What questions will you need to ask yourself when the activity is complete?

Appendix B

1. Active Learning Strategy: Does it fit
      Brief Description: Utilize one of four stems to identify options for a decision and evaluate each option.
      Appreciative Advising Phase: Design
      Purpose: Used to Design the final project of a unit.

2. <u>Prepare for strategy</u>

    <u>Intended outcome</u>
        Co-create a final project for learners to complete.

    <u>Questions for facilitator</u>
        What role will you have in each learner's Design process?
        Review the activity. Which "Fit" is appropriate for this project or how will students choose?
        How will you encourage learners who are unsure?
        How will you encourage learners who need additional challenge?

    <u>Space requirements</u> (Disarm)
        What resources will be readily available for learners?

3. <u>Implement strategy</u>

    <u>Introduction</u> Overview of activity and intended outcomes
        Does It Fit is going to give you the learner an option as to what best captures the design for your final project. After this activity, we will all have direction for your project and can begin implementing.

    <u>Strategy</u> (Adapted from *Making Thinking Visible*) Choose one of the following models:
    1. **Fit your project to the Ideal**
       Identify what the Ideal project would look like and then evaluate your options against it. Ask yourself: How well does each project option fit with the ideal solution?
    2. **Fit your project to the Criteria**
       Identify the criteria or attributes that are important for you to consider in this situation and then evaluate each option against those. Ask yourself: How well does each project option fit the criteria?
    3. **Fit your project to the Situation**
       Identify the realities and constraints of your situation, such as resources and time, and then evaluate each option against them. Ask yourself: How well does each project option fit the realities of the situation?
    4. **Fit your options to you Personally**
       Try out each option by running a "mental movie" in which you imagine yourself carrying out the option and try to get a sense of what it would feel like. Ask yourself: Which project option just feels like the best fit for me?

4. <u>Facilitator reflection</u>

Learners have co-created a plan and you are charged with offering support.

What specific support are you charged with for each learner?
How can you Deliver for each learner?
What will each learner be Delivering?

Appendix C

1. Active Learning Strategy: Connect extend challenge

    Brief Description: Intentional reflection after completing an actionable item.

    Appreciative Advising Phase: Don't Settle

    Purpose: Used with open-ended questions to assist learners in clarifying and solidifying understanding and opportunities of growth.

2. Prepare for strategy

    Intended outcome
        Learners reflect on what has been Delivered and what could be next.

    Questions for facilitator
        What have learners already Delivered?

        How will learners share?

        Don't Settle with your facilitation: what would great look like with this activity?

        What encouragement can you offer learners who are unsure?

        What support can you offer students who Don't Settle?

    Space requirements (Disarm)
        Group or individual sharing? Other?

        What resources will learners need to answer questions?

3. Implement strategy

    Introduction Overview of activity and intended outcomes
        Connect, Extend, Challenge will give you as the learner an opportunity to reflect on what we have just discussed. Use this time to assess your current understanding and I will use these reflections to guide our continued learning and reflect as an instructor.

    Strategy (Adapted from *Making Thinking Visible*)
        CONNECT: How are the ideas and information you presented CONNECTED to what you already know?

        EXTEND: What new ideas did you get that EXTENDED or pushed your thinking in new directions?

        CHALLENGE: How will you CHALLENGE what you have already accomplished? What would your Dream be if there were no limitations?

4. Facilitator reflection

What support do learners need after reflecting and preparing to Not Settle?