

# *Do Students Want to be Active? Overcoming Student Resistance*

Donna M. Qualters, Ph.D.  
Director, Center for Teaching Excellence  
Suffolk University  
Boston, MA

## *Goals for the session:*

- Define the elements of a successful active learning pedagogy
- Discuss the elements of challenge in using active learning pedagogies
- Share the results of an SoTL study on student attitudes toward active learning
- Share ideas and solutions to the challenges

## *What are the Elements of **SUCCESSFUL** ACTIVE LEARNING?*

- Take a minute and write down your definition of active learning
- Then turn to a partner and share definitions
- Then compose a single definition

# *No Standard Definition BUT*

**Most literature about Active  
Learning involves:**

- the active engagement of students in the process of learning
- Investment of physical and mental energies to make learning meaningful

# *Hands on AND Minds on!*

We learn neither by thinking nor by doing

We learn to do *by thinking about* what we are doing

# *Tests of Involvement*

- ***Context*** - appropriate match of the activity to the learning objective
- ***Engaged*** - the more students are involved in all phases of the activity, the better
- ***Reflection***- comprehensive, metacognitive debriefing of the activity with a feedback loop

# Simple to Complex CER

begin

Sociology/  
Education

Study of  
ethnicity  
versus racial  
identity versus  
SES

Activity

Groups:  
Characteristics  
THEN  
Asked to give  
personal  
examples to  
clarify  
characteristic

debrief

R – par excellence!  
Each group gave  
ONE characteristic  
and example  
THEN  
The other groups  
had to tell WHY  
that was or was not  
a characteristic of  
their area.

# Simple to Complex CER

begin

Education

Engage students in Educational Psychology “research”

activity

Groups:  
Each group had a real issue in education today

Student chose their groups

Worked independently

debrief

Presentation of solution within context of course

Questions from the audience

Follow up class in which each project was discussed in context of teaching

# *Challenges to faculty who use active learning?*

<b>Constituents</b>	<b>Class Preparation</b>	<b>In Class Activities</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>	<b>Other</b>
STUDENTS				
COLLEAGUES				
COLLEGE				
SELF				

# *Share a Study.....*

- Research 1 discipline had recently incorporated active learning into 5 courses that were traditionally lecture
- Surveyed their reaction to the changing classroom expectations after one semester
- 113 students – 73% return rate

The activities presented were:

– Low complexity

- One minute papers, T/P/S, concept quizzes, student generated quizzes

– Moderate complexity

- Small groups, peer teaching, games, role plays, cases

## Questions:

- *Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the al techniques relative to traditional lecture format*
- Discuss the effect of the al techniques on your perceived ability to understand the material relative to traditional lecture methods
- *Discuss the inclusion of AL and its effect on the enjoyment level of the class*
- Reflect on your experience as a learner and describe how the AL method matches your learning style

# RESULTS:

## Four themes emerged from the data:

1. Surprisingly students had an overall positive attitude toward active learning!

“Three words...REAL WORLD EXPERIENCE, I cannot emphasize the value of learning through doing.

“this class has been the single most educational experience I’ve undergone so far.”

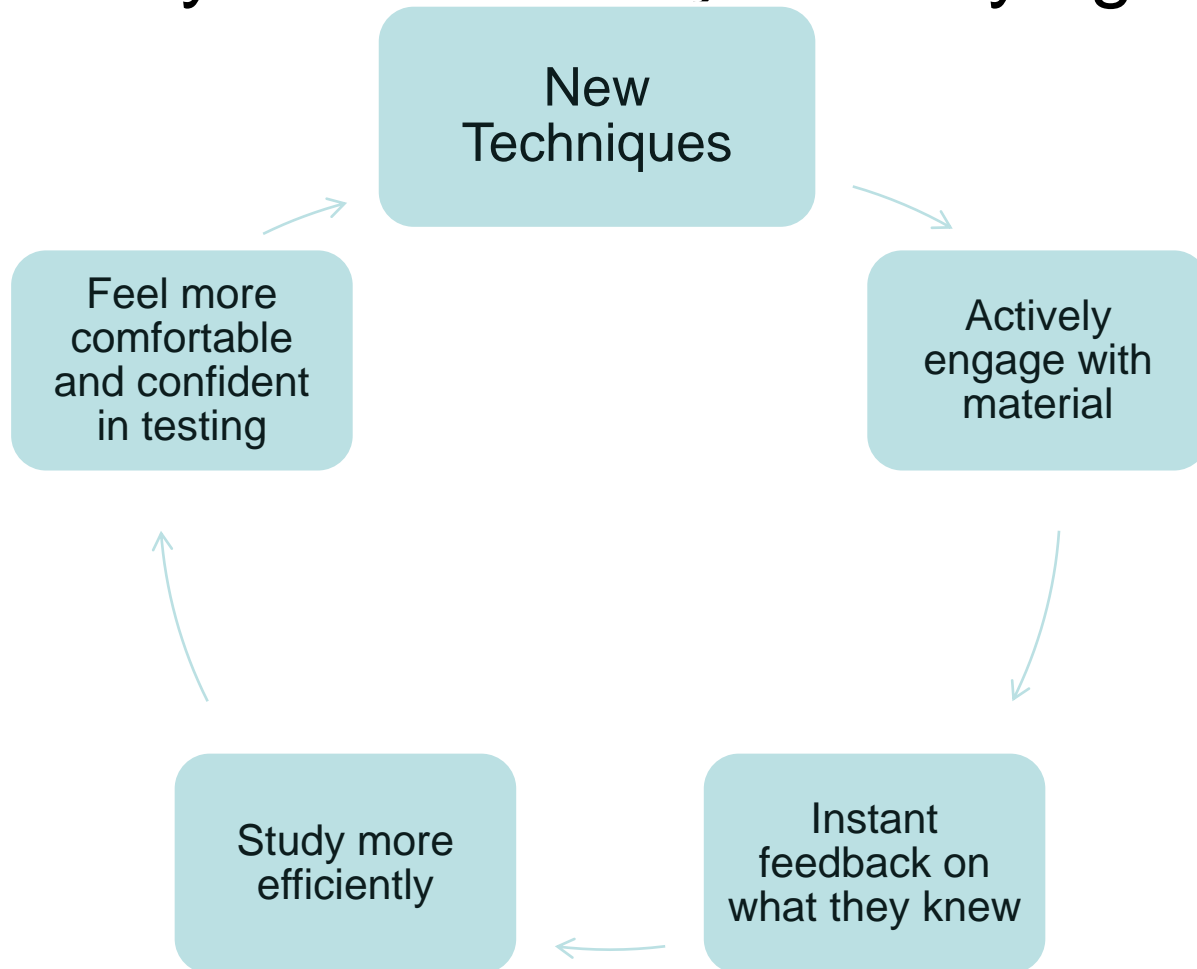
“this class is better because it helps put the material together”

## *Lesson learned:*

- Stay with it! LOTS of grumbling in the early weeks, some faculty wanted to stop and go back to lecture
- Who you hear the grumbling from is important!
- More frequent temperature checks

# Theme #2:

- Students perceived active learning enhanced their ability and efficiency in studying.



## *Lesson Learned:*

- We needed to make this obvious to students earlier
- We needed to find ways beyond the “test” to show them the value

- AL improved the learning environment

*“I felt immense satisfaction in figuring out something and explaining it to my partner”*

*“I feel less pressure in this class because we’re all working together”*

*“For the first time in three years I actually know the person sitting next to me”*

*“I feel a better relationship with my professors”*

Pay attention to the  
affect!!!

- AL promoted their thinking about their learning

*“new techniques are sometimes stressful, you actually have to think actively in class!”*

*“AL lets us see whether or not we’re processing information correctly and let’s us have it explained differently by peers”*

*“examples and working them in class are improving my ability to absorb and learn the material during class”*

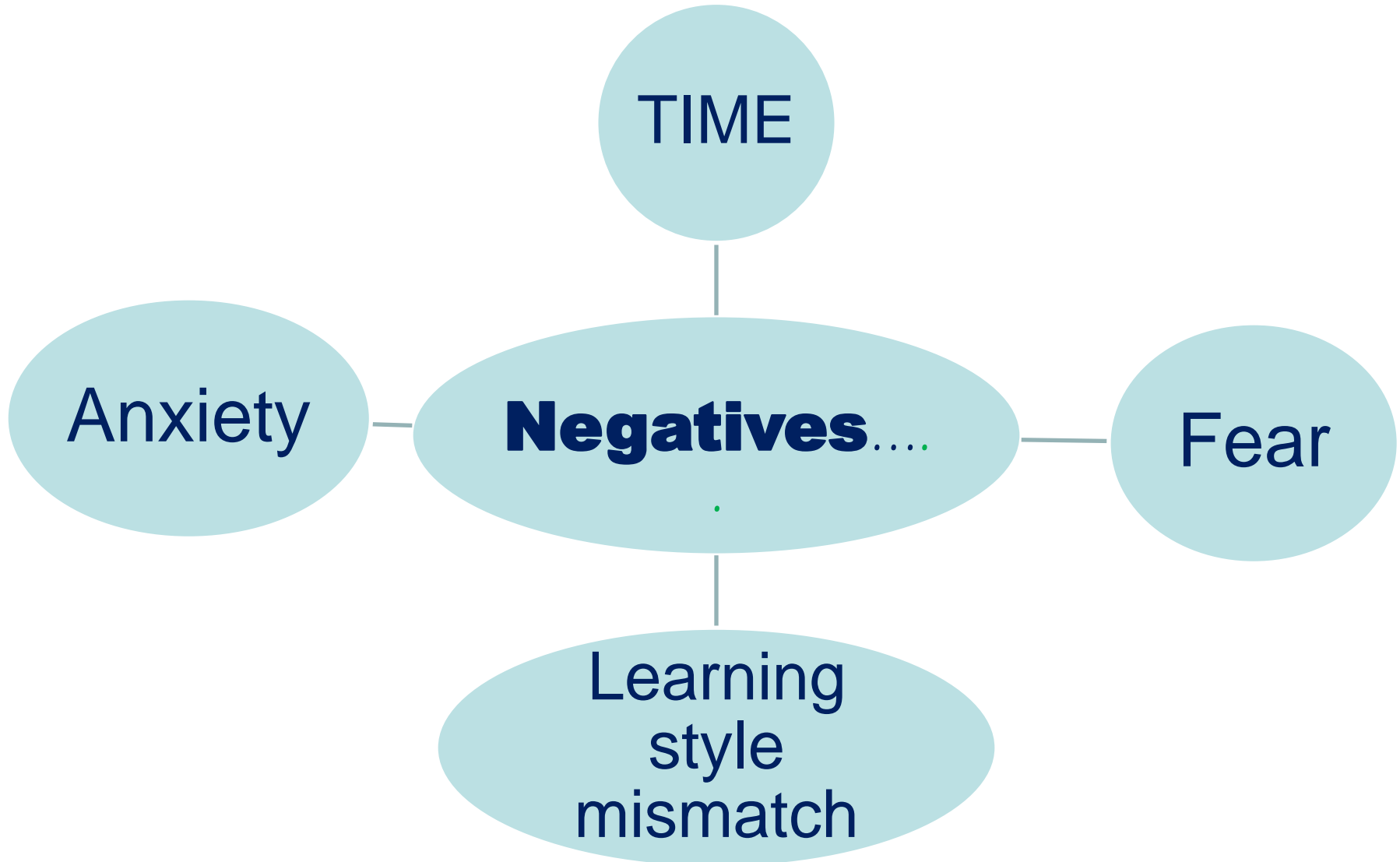
*“Stopping to work gives me time to ponder the material and formulate questions?”*

# *Lesson Learned:*

- Be prepared for the student stress not just the dislike of the methods
- Pay more attention to learning preferences in presenting the material and determining the AL techniques
- Value in reflection on learning



Of course  
not  
everyone  
was  
happy!



# Group Problem Solving

- How do we help students deal with changing techniques and learning environment?
- How do we make students aware of the gains they are making in learning early and often?

# *What we came up with!*

- **Reframing learning** – opening discussion the first class about what constitutes learning? How do they know they've learned? Is memorizing learning?
- **Sharing Expectations early and often!**
  - we needed to make clear the activity purpose, what it would accomplish, and debrief in a clear meta-cognitive way

# *What we came up with!*

- **Tangible awareness of their learning** – journals were kept, in which students reflected on their progress toward the learning goals of the class and what helped them get there.
- **Value of on-going feedback and dialogue** – one minute papers including attitude questions for clarification

- **Support for the faculty** –
  - start small in that don't have to redesign your whole course
  - monthly meetings to share ideas and feedback
  - commitment from administrators of their awareness that change may produce early negative results but that research shows marked improvement once students are comfortable

## SUM UP!

“AL asks me to embrace the knowledge such that I can begin to work with it which makes me much more careful about **UNDERSTANDING!**”

---

# Thoughts!

# Reflections!

# Comments!

# Questions!

[http://www.iupui.edu/~josotl/VOL\\_2/NO\\_1/qualters\\_vol\\_2\\_no\\_1.htm](http://www.iupui.edu/~josotl/VOL_2/NO_1/qualters_vol_2_no_1.htm)