

# The Notion of Active Learning

Some traditional metaphors for learning perceive a learner as an empty vessel or a blank slate to be filled with knowledge. These metaphors have exerted a strong influence on the ways in which we think of teaching and learning in the college classroom. Such views of teaching are reflected in classroom practices that call for the teacher to be the focus of classroom activities and for students to be passive observers. Lecture has long been the standard method of instruction, reinforcing the notion of knowledge as a product to be passed from an instructor to students. Studies of classrooms repeatedly show that nearly 90 percent of time in college classrooms is filled with teacher talk and student note-taking.

However, cognitive researchers argue that knowledge is not simply passed intact from teacher to learner in the learning process, but rather it is actively constructed by learners. As a result, they draw on their previous knowledge, cognitive capacity, and personal experience to integrate new information into the existing knowledge base to further their understanding and influence future learning. Based on such an understanding, national reports and research findings on student learning have advocated actively engaging students in learning through the use of a variety of teaching strategies in the classroom, such as writing, discussions, case studies, and problem solving.