



Research

Perceptions of a faculty cohort using education scholar as a basis for faculty development in active learning strategies

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Abstract

Objective: The purpose of this pilot study was to describe any association between participation in a cohort using the Education Scholar (ES) module with faculties' knowledge toward, perceptions of, and implementation of active learning strategies (ALS) in the didactic classroom. Investigators sought to determine the utility of using ES as a professional development tool at the College.

Methods: Using a pre- and post-questionnaire, mixed-method design, volunteer faculty participants responded to situational, knowledge, and attitudinal questions about ALS used in the classroom, and their reasons for participating in the ES Active Learning Cohort.

Results: Perceptions shifted in that most of the participants indicated that they felt active learning would provide benefits in the classroom. They also reported an increase in confidence to use ALS. All participating faculty reported the use or planned use of some type of ALS in their classes, and all reported satisfaction with active learning as a valuable teaching tool.

Conclusions: Faculty indicated that active learning would be a positive addition to the classroom. This College found that a cohort format for delivery worked well and allowed practice opportunities for participants.

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Introduction

The amount of formal training in teaching and assessment that faculty receive during their postgraduate educational experiences are highly variable.^{1–5} In addition, expectations for faculty effectiveness in teaching and opportunities for development in teaching may vary across any number of factors. Extensive faculty development may be

needed to raise awareness of principles of effective teaching.⁶ More importantly, development in the use of active learning strategies (ALS) in the classroom can help faculty go beyond simply delivering a lecture to promoting student learning.^{7,8} Participation in faculty development programs to enhance ALS skills promotes desirable teaching behaviors.^{1,9} Many universities are attempting to address the need for faculty development by offering teaching skills workshops; however, there is no consensus on best practices or how these programs should be delivered, and longitudinal approaches are relatively rare.⁴ Furthermore, recent reports acknowledge that faculty development programs need to be flexible for participants, such as using online development or independent study offerings.⁵

One option for faculty development of teaching is Education Scholar (ES), (<http://www.educationscholar.org>),¹⁰ an online educational tool for health care education professionals available from the American Association of Col-

At the time of the research project, both authors were affiliated with the University of Oklahoma College of Pharmacy-Tulsa. Dr Davis held the position of Clinical Assistant Professor/Instructional Design Specialist. Dr Desselle held the position of Associate Dean/Professor and Department Chair.

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leges of Pharmacy (ACCP) and created by academicians in pharmacy, dentistry, and education. ES's curriculum includes eight modules: (1) Developing a teaching philosophy, (2) facilitating learning in a traditional classroom, (3) active learning, (4) distance learning, (5) problem-based learning, (6) experiential learning, (7) assessment, and (8) promoting excellence.¹⁰ With recent changes to accreditation standards for colleges and schools of pharmacy,¹¹ and increased attention to Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE) Standard 11, which encourages the use of active learning to teach students,¹¹ one ES module, "Improving Outcomes through the Use of Active Learning Strategies," may be useful for faculty development seeking creative ways to engage students in the classroom.

Although a universally accepted definition of active learning is lacking, it is generally accepted that active learning is an instructional method that engages students in meaningful activities in the classroom and allows for student reflection of the learning.¹²⁻¹⁴ Application of classroom lessons to real-life situations and the sharing of learning with peers comprise the two main objectives of active learning.¹⁵ Engaging the student is one of the most important tasks of teaching,¹⁶ and active learning allows the students to engage multiple learning styles to promote higher-order thinking skills.¹³⁻¹⁷ In an active learning environment, the instructor becomes a facilitator in the learning process and helps raise students' ability to think about their thinking, a process known as *metacognitive awareness*.^{15,18,19} Proven effective at all levels of education, active learning helps students process information more deeply, understand the relevance of material, and stay cued to important content, leading to increased participation, memory retention, transfer of knowledge to new situations, motivation for further learning, critical thinking, and self-evaluation.^{12,14,16,17,20-22}

The benefits of active learning have been well documented in the literature^{12-17,20-23} and recognized by ACPE as an important component in the professional program.¹¹ As a result, the need for faculty development in the area of using ALS has been noted.^{1-3,12,24} Understanding that through collaborative learning, the knowledge created is greater than the sum of the knowledge of individuals in the group,²⁵ a faculty cohort was created to complete the "Improving Outcomes through the Use of Active Learning Strategies" module. The cohort model, led by an instructional design specialist (IDS), was selected to help guide the faculty through the module. A cohort, defined as a small group working together to complete a learning program,²⁵ was selected to offer a structured environment that would allow the participants an opportunity to learn from each other, share successes and challenges, encourage dialogue, and provide an outlet for reflection. The cohort's purpose was to allow participants to explore the issues around using ALS in a two-campus system with the expectation that participants would learn from each other.²⁵⁻²⁷ The cohort model was selected based on research showing that mem-

bership in a cohort can improve scholarly success of members and completion rates.²⁸⁻³⁰ Not only are participants more successful as they work through a program, they are also more successful in the practice of the skills learned.²⁸⁻³⁰ In the cohort model used, the IDS created an environment that provided opportunities for discussion, interaction, reflection, and feedback to foster independence in the participants.

Purpose and objectives

The purpose of this pilot study was to describe faculties' knowledge of, perceptions of, and implementation of ALS in the didactic classroom. In addition, investigators sought to determine the utility of using ES in a cohort format as a professional development tool at the College. Few, if any, studies have documented the use and outcomes of ES modules in pharmacy faculty development. Although mentioned often in health science literature,³¹⁻³⁶ a literature search using the key words "faculty development" and "education scholar" did not return any articles discussing the utility of the online tool ES.

Methods

All full-time faculty at the University of Oklahoma College of Pharmacy (OUCOP), a two-campus system with approximately 130 students per class, were invited to voluntarily enroll in the ES Active Learning Cohort by the College's full-time IDS. The College purchased a site license for ES, and all faculty, regardless of cohort participation, were provided access to the ES site. The IDS developed a learning program for the cohort, assigned module readings, timelines for participation, and facilitated face-to-face meetings that were broadcast between the campuses (Appendix A). The face-to-face meetings used small classroom teaching techniques and incorporated the tools of active learning being presented in the module. The program spanned one semester, with five face-to-face meetings occurring approximately once per month. To maintain the effectiveness of the cohort model described in the literature,²⁵⁻²⁷ the original group was limited to a maximum of 15 participants; 11 faculty volunteered and completed the cohort program. The institutional review board reviewed and approved the project as an exempt study.

Using a pre- and post-questionnaire mixed-methods design, the faculty anonymously answered situational questions (e.g., number of years as a faculty member and teaching experience) and questions about their knowledge of active learning, their perceptions about use of ALS in the classroom, the ALS used in their classroom, and their reasons for participating in the ES Active Learning Cohort. Pre- and post-questionnaires were not matched because of the small size of the participant group. Once completed, each questionnaire could not be matched to an individual to preserve anonymity. The investigators did send two e-mail

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