Chapter 14

The Interteaching Approach: Enhancing Participation and Critical Thinking

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ABSTRACT

Interteaching is a pedagogical technique designed to increase student engagement and facilitate peer-to-peer learning. Studies of interteaching have largely supported the efficacy of this approach with regard to academic performance and student satisfaction. In this chapter, the literature evaluating the effectiveness of interteaching is reviewed, and a study of the incorporation of interteaching into an associate-level course within the author’s institution is described. Outcomes of the interteaching course are compared with those from the same course in a previous quarter utilizing more traditional teaching methods. The chapter concludes with practical suggestions for the application of interteaching within the classroom and in distance learning. Recommendations for the incorporation of digital teaching and learning applications to augment this pedagogical style are also provided.

INTRODUCTION

Traditional lecture-style classes continue to dominate the undergraduate learning arena (Saville & Zinn, 2011; Sturmey, Dalfen, & Fienup, 2015). Arguably, there are advantages to lecture style teaching, including the ability to present a body of knowledge in an organized, sequential manner; flexibility to both a wide range of topics and audiences; and less time-consuming preparation for the instructor (Kaur, 2011; Sturmey et al., 2015). While traditional lectures have been identified as effective for transference of knowledge from instructor to student, the goal of the classroom must be considered. Are instructors attempting to teach students to become repositories of knowledge and information, or should the classroom be a venue in which students learn to use the material in a purposeful way in order to develop critical thinking skills? Despite its popularity, the lecture method of teaching does not facilitate higher learning outcomes, nor does it enhance practical skills or increase student participation, both of which are necessary to teach students how to learn and develop critical thinking skills (Canella-Malone, Axe, & Parker, 2009; Nilson, 2010; Saville & Zinn, 2011).

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Similar to clinical fields in medicine, such as nursing, psychology and social work, where evidence-based practice originated, responsible educators must be open to teaching and learning methods that incorporate current knowledge, trustworthy research, and innovative technology. Stakeholders in education, including students, employers, legislative and governing bodies, and funding sources, compel educators and educational institutions to be accountable for academic quality and outcomes. Instructors can improve their course delivery by investigating teaching methods that are supported by evidence, rather than basing their approach on tradition (Groccia & Buskist, 2011). An evidence-based search in an online research database will identify numerous active teaching and learning strategies and their influences on higher education learning. Many of these strategies achieve multiple objectives which may be lacking in the lecture-based college classroom, such as improved student preparation, enhanced in-class engagement, increased problem-solving skills, and development of critical thinking. Research on human learning has found that the traditional lecture is less advantageous to student outcomes than the more recent, experiential, and evidence-based approaches (Cannella-Malone et al., 2009).

The interteaching approach is one such pedagogical method, which is based on behavior-analytic principles (Soldner, Rosales, & Crimando, 2015). Boyce and Hineline (2002) introduced interteaching as a method of enabling behavioral change within the classroom, as opposed to simple dissemination of information. While the instructor’s role becomes that of a facilitator of learning (Scoboria, Sirois, & Pascual-Leone, 2009), student responsibilities for preparation and participation expand, thus fostering mastery of course material. Interteaching can be implemented in a wide variety of academic disciplines, as well as to a diverse population of students at all levels of higher education (Sturmey et al., 2015). This pedagogical approach incorporates a number of sound educational principles, including 1) enhanced interactions among students and instructor, 2) knowledge exchange and student collaboration, 3) active learning, and 4) timely feedback (Buskit & Groccia, 2011).

This chapter examines interteaching through an evidence-based approach. The interteaching methodology is outlined, and a comprehensive literature review is presented. Additionally, the author’s own study of the incorporation of interteaching into a gerontology course in an associate-level occupational therapy assistant program is examined utilizing both quantitative and qualitative data. Results are compared with those of the same course taught six months earlier, applying more traditional teaching/learning techniques. The chapter concludes with specific steps to take to efficiently incorporate the interteaching methodology into course redesign, along with practical advice for managing barriers that may be encountered in the process.

BACKGROUND

In response to the growing concern that the traditional lecture classroom format is ineffective in enhancing critical thinking and teaching students how to learn, Boyce and Hineline (2002) developed an alternative classroom design using the principles of behavior analysis. Students are no longer spectators, but rather enter into a classroom of engagement, inquiry, and peer interactions; instructors become facilitators of learning, as they interact with students on a more individual basis rather than as a whole (Brown, Killingsworth, & Alavosius, 2014). The process and mechanisms of interteaching sessions, as described in the literature, vary slightly from study to study (Boyce & Hineline, 2002; Brown et al., 2014; Saville & Zinn, 2011; Zayac & Paulk, 2014); however, the following principles remain constant: