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Early Class Self-Preparation: A Step Ahead for a Better Learning Experience

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Attending class is not merely walking and sitting still while letting yourself wait for the instructor to tell you what you are expected to learn and do for the lessons learned that day. It is more than going through the same routine that students mostly expect to experience each day they go to class. Students are not fully aware of how important it is to get themselves well-prepared before attending a class. Generally, being well-prepared for class has more to do with how well you spend your time wisely, which has less to do with how much you spend your time preparing for the class. It has a similarity with the time you spend taking an examination, which means that the more time you spend studying, the more you will be well-prepared for the examination. A well-prepared class will enhance an active learning environment, increase students' engagement in learning, stimulate learning interest, and encourage collaborative learning.

Becoming an active learner is very crucial to learning, as it will encourage the students to be responsible in their learning. It will also inculcate a positive learning environment. Early class preparation helps the students prepare for the lesson they expect to learn. For instance, when they know what they will be learning, it will be easier for them to ask questions. By doing so, it will also help them to instill a positive mood, and at the same time, it will help the instructor facilitate the learners in the class activities. Similarly, students can understand the topic better than passive learners. In addition to that, the active learners will encourage their classmates by asking relevant questions. This will help other students get the needed information for the parts that need further clarification. In a study conducted by Moravec et al. (2010), cited in Nkhoma, Nkhoma, Ulhaq, and Sang (2017, p. 87), it was shown that "an early class reading strategy used in cell biology classes

produced positive outcomes in the generation of new knowledge, in-class engagement with peers, and for assessments." This means that early class preparation can be a positive indicator of greater student engagement, which will produce more active learners, thus contributing to an active learning environment.



Increasing Students' Engagement in Learning

Align with active participation in class; engagement in learning is regarded as a fundamental part of early class preparation. When the students are well-prepared before going to class, it will be easier for them to get engaged during class activities. Not only is it important to be engaged in learning, but it also helps the students prepare themselves for class activities. Other than that, engagement could possibly come from a variety of activities, such as group activities, that can teach the students to work with different people with different perspectives. It will also teach the students to cooperate with others with different opinions. According to Nkhoma et al. (2017), activities such as watching an online short lecture, peer-to-peer group activities, and preliminary readings are essential for early class participation. At the same time, early preparation for class will help them easily adapt to class activities, thus creating active student participation.

Stimulating Learning Interest

On another note, students are not aware of the importance of stimulating their interest in learning the topic of the subject. Interest is crucial in encouraging the students to inquire about anything that they want to know more about. That is when they need to realise that early class preparation is important. In fact, learning interest is very much equal to intrinsic motivation, where the students are intrinsically motivated to learn without enforcement. This happens either because the students really enjoyed learning the subject or because their interest has slowly grown during the learning process. In this situation, the students are aware of the benefits of becoming successful people with a bright future awaiting them. They will develop a learning interest as early as they get started by making early class preparations. This is also supported by Nkhoma et al. (2017), who argue that students' motivation to read extensively for early class preparation needs to not only be assisted by careful selection of readings but also needs to be monitored by the instructor, such as through graded questions or written assignments. By doing so, it will encourage the students to be well-prepared for class and motivate them to take their learning seriously.



Encouraging Collaborative Learning

Moreover, awareness should also be placed on the importance of collaborative learning. Collaborative learning can be achieved through early class preparation when the students make early preparations before coming to class, for instance,

by reading the material a day before the class starts and doing their own revision before starting with a new topic. These activities can help students increase their understanding and build up critical thinking skills. At the same time, it promotes active engagement among students during group work. Given a situation where the instructor instructs a group of students to solve a case study, a well-prepared student can lead a discussion and encourage others to ask questions. On the same token, they are learning from each other's strengths and weaknesses. Students need to understand that collaborative learning is not all about finding absolute solutions to the issues discussed in a group. The most important thing is that collaboration rests on the tolerance and acceptance of opinions among the group members.

In conclusion, early class preparation helps the students develop an interest in learning the subject and promotes their engagement. It also helps them to actively participate in class activities, thus creating an active learning environment. Besides that, it inculcates collaborative learning, which helps to increase their understanding through critical thinking and, at the same time, encourages the students to generate ideas to achieve a mutual understanding among themselves. Therefore, students need to develop self-awareness about the importance of early class preparation so that they can benefit from being well-prepared before joining the class. It is hoped that getting themselves ready before class could change their learning habits, which depend too much on the instructor providing everything needed for the subject. Instead, practising early class preparation helps them become independent learners.

Reference

Nkhoma, C., Nkhoma, M., Ulhaq, I., & Sang, M. Q. (2017). Enhancing students' learning through early class preparation. Proceedings of the Informing Science and Information Technology Education Conference, Vietnam, 85-95. Santa Rosa, CA: Informing Science Institute. Retrieved from <http://www.informingscience.org/Publications/3756>

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