

Methodological profile: Active Plenary

Description

Active plenary is a concept for the active participation of students in the teaching-learning process. The aim of the concept is for students to solve tasks together and to apply subject-specific ways of thinking and working. As students take on parts of the teaching role, teaching becomes something that teachers and students share responsibility for and which they shape together.

The term "active plenary" was proposed by Ulrich Iberer and underlines the learner-activating potential of the social form of "plenary" – a form of teaching usually associated with frontal teaching and thus with passivity. The active plenary method evolved from the action-oriented, constructivist "Learning through Teaching" (LdL) method founded by Jean-Pol Martin in 1982 and further developed by Joachim Grzega. The LdL model aims at the transfer of knowledge by the learners themselves ("class as brain").

The active plenary method can be used in many different ways. Among other things, it is suitable for brainstorming, solving tasks together, promoting content exchange and reflecting on one's own learning status. It is suitable for small groups as well as for events with many participants.

Objectives

This method can be used to develop and enhance a wide range of competencies, for example:

- Understanding complex issues
- Learning how to debate and solve problems
- Practicing collaborative work
- Reflecting on learning processes and learning progress
- Sharing responsibility for successful teaching
- Acquiring moderation experience
- Enhancing dialogue and communication skills

Participants

- Small groups consisting of 8 or more study participants
- Larger groups including those in lecture settings

Role of the teacher

- Preparation of questions, tasks, problems, theses and materials
- Method presentation



- While the students are solving a problem collaboratively, the teacher takes a step back and sits at the back of the lecture hall.
- If the problem solving in the plenary stalls, the teacher provides tips or points out mistakes. Choosing the right time to intervene requires sensitivity.
- The teacher gives methodological-didactic hints to the students standing at the front (e.g. "You are covering the blackboard", "A person in row seven raises a hand", "You could now ask if anyone else has a question").

Requirements and Materials

- The teacher prepares questions, tasks, problems, and theses related to the topic.
- Students are expected to be prepared for the plenary session, for example, by reading the script or watching a video lecture beforehand.
- A room equipped with a blackboard or a space to put up posters.
- Chalk or a marker pen for the student who collects the ideas from the plenary.

Time requirement

- The active plenary can take place as a scenario within a session or during the entire session.
- It is suitable for both seminar and lecture sessions.

Methodology

- **Introduction:** At first, the teacher explains the methodology.
- **Implementation:**
 - The teacher poses a question, a task, a problem or a thesis in the plenary.
 - The participants engage in discussions, make collective decisions, share ideas and collaboratively solve the problem. The "Think-Pair-Share" method can be used, involving individual work, partner work and group work.
 - One student moderates the discussion. Another student takes notes on the blackboard.
 - The teacher takes a step back from the proceedings and sits at the very back of the lecture hall.
 - The students engage in processes such as problem-solving, argumentation, and communication. Contributions should be permitted to be expressed in an open and non-judgmental manner. Errors are acceptable.
 - Recommendation: Phases of the "active plenary" should alternate with brief lecture sessions delivered by the teacher, in order to provide new stimuli for the participants' thinking. Following group discussions and task assignments, it is advisable for the teacher to recapitulate the central outcomes.



Literature and links

Berger, Lutz/ Grzega, Joachim/ Spannagel, Christian (Hg.) (2011): Lernen durch Lehren im Fokus. Berichte von LdL-Einsteigern und LdL-Experten. Ein Workshop-Band zum LdL-Tag 2009 an der Pädagogischen Hochschule Ludwigsburg. Berlin: epubli GmbH. The anthology provides field reports and usage examples by both experienced and inexperienced practitioners of LdL. Notable contributions include Ulrich Iberer's analysis of the social significance of the 'plenary' format in modern constructivist learning theories, and Christian Spannagel's exploration of the 'active plenary' concept in mathematics lectures.

Hoffmann, Friederike (2015): Das aktive Plenum [Blogeintrag]. In: Didaktikblog Hohenheim, published on 08.04.2015, online at: <https://didaktikblog.uni-hohenheim.de/2015/04/das-aktive-plenum/> (last access: 31.07.2023)

Information and field reports on LdL can be found on the LdL platform <http://www.ldl.de/> (last access: 31.07.2023).

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