

The Learning Curve

Episode 16: Active Learning with Dr. Ruth Jeminiwa

[00;00;03;21 - 00;00;18;15] **Demi Harte**

Welcome to the Learning Curve, an audio series presented by the Academic Commons.

[00;00;18;17 - 00;00;21;02] **Demi Harte**

Your host for today's episode are Demi.

[00;00;21;10 - 00;00;23;01] **Jacob Santos**

And me, Jacob.

[00;00;23;04 - 00;00;32;01] **Demi Harte**

Our mission is to illuminate higher education, teaching and learning through the power of shared experiences and research informed practices.

[00;00;32;03 - 00;01;03;28] **Jacob Santos**

On this episode of The Learning Curve, we'll be discussing active learning with Ruth Jeminiwa, PhD. Stick around this episode to learn about how you can increase student engagement, promote higher order thinking skills, and connect material to real world problems in your classroom. Doctor Jeminiwa is an assistant professor of pharmacy practice in Thomas Jefferson University's College of Pharmacy. Among her numerous research interests in medicine and in shared decision making between patients and their doctors.

[00;01;04;00 - 00;01;18;14] **Jacob Santos**

Doctor Jeminiwa has engaged in SoTL research focused on active learning with pharmacy students. It is her research and engagement with active learning practices that brings her on the show today. Welcome, Ruth.

[00;01;18;16 - 00;01;22;07] **Ruth Jeminiwa**

Thank you. I'm happy to be here.

[00;01;22;10 - 00;01;32;14] **Demi Harte**

We're happy to have you. To start off, could you tell us a little bit about yourself, your academic pursuits and your role here at Thomas Jefferson University?

[00;01;32;17 - 00;01;55;03] **Ruth Jeminiwa**

Thank you. Demi. I'm an assistant professor in the Department of Practice at the Jefferson College of Pharmacy. I'm also deeply invested in teaching student pharmacists and making sure that they are engaged and successful in class.

[00;01;55;05 - 00;02;11;10] **Jacob Santos**

Your investment in students and desire for them to be engaged and do their best in class is something we really look forward to discussing with you today. So could you describe your teaching practice in three words?

[00;02;11;13 - 00;02;21;26] **Ruth Jeminiwa**

This would be number one - application. Two would be student centered, and the third would be active learning.

[00;02;21;28 - 00;02;31;10] **Demi Harte**

Straight to the point I love it. This are great words. So speaking of active learning, could you actually define active learning for our listeners?

[00;02;31;12 - 00;03;12;14] **Ruth Jeminiwa**

Active learning is engaging students as partners in the learning process. So rather than the student passively receiving information from the instructor, the instructor flips that and asks students to do something with the information that they received. So usually higher order thinking activities, things like asking students to create a solution to a problem, or maybe applying information to solve real world problems, justifying the opposition, etc. and so whenever they use these higher order thinking skills, they are learning, and interaction with the material deepens.

[00;03;12;19 - 00;03;25;16] **Ruth Jeminiwa**

And they are also better able to, you know, see the relevance of what they are learning and how what they're learning can be transferred even outside of the classroom.

[00;03;25;19 - 00;03;44;24] **Jacob Santos**

That's excellent. Thank you. Perfect definition for active learning. Now active learning can be a transition that can be difficult sometimes or require a lot more planning on the instructor side. So we're curious when did you start exploring active learning in your teaching?

[00;03;44;26 - 00;04;16;21] **Ruth Jeminiwa**

For me it started in graduate school. I was exposed to active learning through a scholarship of Teaching and Learning MOOC, and I was immediately fascinated. It just shifted the way I thought about teaching, and I became really interested in creating learning experiences that were very student centered and also, you know, maximize class time in making, reinforcing and supporting students understanding of class material.

[00;04;16;24 - 00;04;39;16] **Ruth Jeminiwa**

And also during graduate school, I also, you know, served as a teaching assistant in a course where active learning was heavily integrated. You know, I would facilitate flipped classroom sessions. And so that was really the beginning for me. So once I got into Jefferson, I immediately implemented active learning.

[00;04;39;18 - 00;04;57;23] **Jacob Santos**

Awesome. I love that you jumped right in and started with that. So I'm curious if you could expand a little bit on this journey of exploring active learning. Can you describe a little bit what that process was like for you to start implementing active learning practices?

[00;04;57;25 - 00;05;26;07] **Ruth Jeminiwa**

Yes. So when I joined Jefferson, I started with the pharmacoeconomics course that I teach to third year pharmacy students. And so I flipped some of the classes. So I would provide material for students to engage with outside the classroom. So essentially first contact with material occurred outside the classroom. They would maybe watch recorded presentation, read a material, and then there would also be quizzed.

[00;05;26;08 - 00;05;52;27] **Ruth Jeminiwa**

The purpose of the quiz is to check their knowledge, make sure they are, you know, ready before coming to class. So whenever they were in class they would go through structured problems with peers. So that's a case based learning piece. So we would have like, you know, real world problems that are framed for students. They would work together in a group and just walk through the problems together.

[00;05;52;29 - 00;06;24;02] **Ruth Jeminiwa**

So I have used this approach consistently for the past five years here at Jefferson and I consistently see feedback, you know, during the course evaluations, where students ask for me to expand that activity so students genuinely enjoy the sessions and are very engaged. Apart from the pharmacoeconomics course, I also teach US healthcare systems to first year student pharmacists, and in that course, I introduced the jigsaw activity as a peer driven exam review.

[00;06;24;05 - 00;06;35;08] **Ruth Jeminiwa**

And students have also showed, you know, satisfaction and enthusiasm for that method as well.

[00;06;35;10 - 00;06;56;27] **Demi Harte**

That's really cool that students provide that feedback and want more in certain engaging activities to be expanded on. So that's really cool. And I would say that would be an advantage of active learning. But are there any other advantages that active learning offers over traditional lectures in the classroom?

[00;06;56;29 - 00;07;32;04] **Ruth Jeminiwa**

Yes, of course. So traditional lectures can sometimes feel like a one way street where the expert provides information and students rely on memorization to just pass the class. So the problem is that students may leave with only very superficial understanding of the material. Active learning flips that dynamic. Students become active partners. They help to build their own understanding by engaging directly with the content.

[00;07;32;04 - 00;07;58;14] **Ruth Jeminiwa**

So the instructor would structure the class in the manner that students get to, you know, wrestle with ideas, ask questions, directly apply information in real time to solve problems. Because of that deeper engagement, you know, they tend to develop deeper understanding and perform better on assessments. And also, more importantly, they are better prepared to apply what they learned in practice.

[00;07;58;15 - 00;08;20;16] **Jacob Santos**

I love that attention to wanting your students to develop a deeper understanding and better apply what they're learning to their day to day careers when they leave your classroom, making sure that that knowledge is better applied and more useful for them. You talked about some flipped learning techniques. You also mentioned a jigsaw activity as part of your exam review.

[00;08;20;18 - 00;08;27;15] **Jacob Santos**

What active learning strategies are you currently using in your classroom that you find most effective?

[00;08;27;17 - 00;08;57;14] **Ruth Jeminiwa**

So there are so many tools in the toolbox. And for me, I have, you know, explored and utilized three that I love the most. So first, number one, I like think pair share. And that's because it's so easy to implement. And you would immediately see participation and you would see the room become animated instantly as students begin to engage and talk, share knowledge with each other.

[00;08;57;15 - 00;09;25;01] **Ruth Jeminiwa**

So whenever I have traditional lectures, I would use think pair share to punctuate the lecture and also get students to actively use the knowledge that they just received in a way that helps to reinforce what was taught, and then also get ready to engage with the rest of the class. Apart from think pair share, I also use flipped Classroom, but I usually pair it with case-based learning.

[00;09;25;02 - 00;09;48;25] **Ruth Jeminiwa**

Those are two separate active learning strategies. Flipped classroom. The idea is that students engage first with the material outside of the class. So class time is used to reinforce learning. And so for me, class time is usually when I would implement case based learning where I have real world scenarios, real world problems, and immediately it makes the students to see the relevance of what they are teaching.

[00;09;48;25 - 00;10;13;12] **Ruth Jeminiwa**

It's no longer abstract, right? They're using it. They're working together. They're collaborating with their peers to solve real world problems. And so as you're doing this, they are reinforcing the knowledge that they first encountered outside the classroom. So they are talking through things with their peers. They're learning higher order thinking skills from each other and their motivation and engagement increases.

[00;10;13;12 - 00;10;37;16] **Demi Harte**

I love those activities. And there are so many. There are so many types of activities you can use, but think pair share is commonly brought up and it's for a good reason. It's a really great one. So I'm curious. Some faculty might be like, I don't want to do these type of active learning activities because I have a lot to teach, and just doing a presentation and memorization is just going to work out the best.

[00;10;37;16 - 00;10;47;01] **Demi Harte**

But with active learning, do you find that it's easier to teach these lessons with those activities versus not?

[00;10;47;03 - 00;11;12;27] **Ruth Jeminiwa**

Active learning can work with whatever content. So the main point is you're just doing things differently, right? And so depending on the one you want to go with. So if you want to go with the flipped classroom. So maybe ask them to read up the material outside of the class. And then you use class time to, you know, do knowledge checks, do application type problems where they are, you know, using it, applying it to solve a problem.

[00;11;12;28 - 00;11;48;21] **Ruth Jeminiwa**

You know, they're just justifying their position on the matter. They are just leveraging the knowledge that they encountered outside of the classroom. So you're reinforcing knowledge. You're clarifying things to students during class time. If you wanted to go with case based learning, it means that beforehand you, the instructor, you would have prepared a case that is relevant to the topic, and then students will be the ones to, you know, unravel or walk through the problems together with their colleagues, and you're there as a facilitator, so if there's any confusion, you can come in.

[00;11;48;21 - 00;12;18;17] **Ruth Jeminiwa**

And for me, the way I would implement a case-based learning is that at the end, there would be a debrief session where we go through everything together as a class, instead of just providing information and students go back to memorize, you're really taking the time to guide them, work with them as they build understanding, and also do your best in reinforcing and clarifying class material to students, which students do appreciate.

[00;12;18;20 - 00;12;24;20] **Ruth Jeminiwa**

They love all these student-centered approaches.

[00;12;24;22 - 00;12;54;18] **Jacob Santos**

So you just mentioned the students love these approaches and how much it is beneficial for them in the classroom, how it doesn't matter how big the content is, you can adapt it to active learning strategies. These are strategies that can be implemented across the board. What changes did you notice in your classroom when you started incorporating more active learning strategies in your lessons?

[00;12;54;20 - 00;13;21;28] **Ruth Jeminiwa**

The biggest change for me was engagement and for the course that I started with, the pharmacoeconomics course. Prior to joining Jefferson, I had been told, what can you do to make students better engaged and more interested in the course? And so when I introduced the active learning, I just noticed better engagement, more participation. Students became more active participants in class, more comfortable sharing their perspectives.

[00;13;21;28 - 00;13;38;04] **Ruth Jeminiwa**

And I have heard students ask if we could flip the entire course, which may not be practical, but it shows how engaged and how they value the format.

[00;13;38;06 - 00;13;51;29] **Demi Harte**

So you presented at Faculty Day 2025 about a jigsaw activity. Could you explain a jigsaw learning activity and why you felt that this was the best activity for your class?

[00;13;52;01 - 00;14;24;10] **Ruth Jeminiwa**

So a jigsaw activity involves getting two groups within the classroom, so one being the home group and the other expert group. Students are members of both groups. So expert groups you have students committing to mastering a specific topic for each expert group. And then they would return to their home group to teach their peers. So I love this approach because everybody gets the opportunity to serve as a learner and also as a teacher.

[00;14;24;15 - 00;14;47;19] **Ruth Jeminiwa**

And for the US health care system course, it's for first year students. This is their first time, you know, in the pharmacy school. And this approach, apart from helping them to better understand class material, hearing their peers explain things, just giving them insight into how other people are thinking about class material, but it also creates a sense of belonging.

[00;14;47;20 - 00;15;13;10] **Ruth Jeminiwa**

Because now you bring something to the table, right? You're sharing the material with your peers, you're participating, you serve as a learner, and you're also a teacher, and you're also collaborating with your peers. So it's very helpful, that peer to peer exchange promotes higher order thinking skills, and is also helpful in making everybody to have a sense of belonging in the class.

[00;15;13;12 - 00;15;34;19] **Demi Harte**

Thank you for that explanation. I do think it's a great activity and that peer conversations is so important, especially when you have something like a large lecture hall space that you're working with. And there's so many students in there, and we were wondering if you could tell us how you would organize a jigsaw activity in a lecture hall space.

[00;15;34;22 - 00;16;02;16] **Ruth Jeminiwa**

So for a jigsaw activity. What I usually would do is to request for round tables. So even if the room you know was arranged differently during traditional lectures, then I had to, I request for round tables so each home group would sit around a table, and within each home group you would have representative from the different expert groups. And so those experts will take turns reviewing their content with the with the home group.

[00;16;02;19 - 00;16;24;25] **Ruth Jeminiwa**

This keeps things very structured and very, very interactive. So within the group I would usually, you know, ask students to designate or you know, nominate themselves to be timekeeper, moderator, the scribe. And so they keep themselves organized and, you know, structured and they keep themselves going.

[00;16;24;26 - 00;16;48;04] **Jacob Santos**

I love that that flexibility you implement with requesting for round tables and how you don't let the lecture hall space limit what you can do with your students. Rather looking for creative solutions around the limitations of the space so that you can further engage them, which is excellent. We love seeing that in the classrooms and in the learning.

[00;16;48;04 - 00;17;10;27] **Jacob Santos**

So you talked about bringing in the round tables, assigning roles timekeeper, note taker, moderator, etc. we're curious about the choices of technology you incorporated into that activity, particularly your use of social media with students and what the motivation behind that was and how you implemented that.

[00;17;10;29 - 00;17;46;14] **Ruth Jeminiwa**

So the year when I integrated social media, what happened was the expert groups, they recorded a 60 second YouTube reel on that topic, and they posted that on Canvas, which was made available for all students in the course to review, comment and just learn. Essentially, what I noticed was that students really took it seriously because they integrated some of the TikTok trends and making it like, really fun to watch.

[00;17;46;16 - 00;18;09;02] **Ruth Jeminiwa**

You know, it was nearly impossible for you to watch without laughing, but like, you're learning in a very fun way. So I saw students really lean into it and do things that went beyond what I expected. And so the entire class really had fun watching and commenting on the videos, while also learning at the same time. So with that modified piece, you know,

[00;18;09;04 - 00;18;27;17] **Ruth Jeminiwa**

We didn't have like the round tables, we didn't have a need for students to come together and learn as a group. It was more self-directed, after the expert groups posted the reels on the learning platform.

[00;18;27;20 - 00;18;39;06] **Demi Harte**

It's such a fun way to incorporate social media, which is, you know, what so many students and all of us are just engaged with all the time, and I can only imagine what some of those videos looked like.

[00;18;39;07 - 00;19;02;12] **Jacob Santos**

That's awesome that you incorporated a YouTube reel. I think when we incorporate technology and elements of our students lives that they're passionate about, they're always going to bring their best effort into that activity. So that's awesome to hear. So we are actually coming to the end of our interview. You've answered our questions so beautifully, and we want to ask as we draw our interview to a close.

[00;19;02;14 - 00;19;15;13] **Jacob Santos**

Can you provide 1 or 2 pieces of advice that you would give to educators who are curious about incorporating active learning in their courses?

[00;19;15;15 - 00;19;45;29] **Ruth Jeminiwa**

Sure. First would be to really explore the different methods that are out there. So for me, I just use three for different courses. The first thing to do basically is to explore the different active learning strategies that are available and to be comfortable with them and see the one that works. Given the course that you are teaching, the one that you that you're most comfortable with, and just begin from somewhere.

[00;19;46;00 - 00;20;18;21] **Ruth Jeminiwa**

So that first implementation may not be perfect, but from implementing it, you will learn how to do it better and be open to feedback from students. Students always provide valuable feedback that you could use to modify or improve from year to year. The goal really is to support student learning and to help students to be successful. So think about it that way, because sometimes it may require flexibility, or sometimes a little bit more from you as the instructor to make it happen.

[00;20;18;21 - 00;20;24;11] **Ruth Jeminiwa**

But just keep it in mind that the main goal is really to support the students to be better successful.

[00;20;24;12 - 00;20;35;00] **Demi Harte**

That does bring us to the end of our interview for the day. So Ruth, thank you so much for taking time out of your day to be here with us and share your knowledge and expertise.

[00;20;35;02 - 00;20;38;25] **Ruth Jeminiwa**

Thank you.

[00;20;38;27 - 00;20;51;27] **Leah Miller**

Thank you for joining us this month on The Learning Curve. You can find more information and resources related to this episode at AcademicCommons.jefferson.edu/TheLearningCurve

[00;20;51;29 - 00;21;05;16] **Leah Miller**

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