In 2015 Penrickton Center for the Blind, Perkins School for the Blind and Texas School for the Blind began a collaborative effort to create a website devoted to the Active Learning approach to instruction that was developed by Dr. Lilli Nielsen, from Denmark. This effort came about when we realized that in the United States, this approach was not well known and that we had only one person who was providing training on Active Learning.

Patty Obrzut, Assistant Director of Penrickton and a certified Occupational Therapist, received her training directly from Dr. Nielsen and was authorized to provide training on the content in the United States. In addition to her many responsibilities at Penrickton Center for Blind Children, Patty traveled (and still travels) throughout the country providing two-day workshops on Active Learning. Texas School for the Blind & Visually Impaired has hosted Patty as our speaker for many years and these trainings were always very well received. However, it seemed these workshops were not enough to see this approach successfully implemented in classrooms serving children who are visually impaired or DeafBlind who also had significant and multiple disabilities.

My colleagues, Gigi Newton and Stacy Shafer, and I worried mightily about the future of Active Learning in Texas. What would happen when Patty was no longer able to provide these trainings? If the workshops alone were not enough to help teachers implement a quality program in their classrooms, how could we beef up the training? Was there some way to create an abiding resource for others to learn about Active Learning?

In 2014 Texas School for the Blind & Visually Impaired Outreach Programs began to offer a series of live webinars on Active Learning. The Active Learning Study Group webinars were also archived on the TSBVI website for on-demand viewing. These webinars continue to take place into 2019 and draw audiences from around the world. Though they had a good reception, still change, actual change in implementing Active Learning in the classroom, is still not much in evidence in this country.

With the addition of Active Learning Space website, better marketing, and a beginning collaboration with the Texas Low Incidence Disabilities network, greater interest in Active Learning grew in Texas. Still it didn’t seem to meet the needs of the public, especially as the website grew. There was so much good information and videos on the Active Learning Space site that parents and teachers didn’t know where to begin! So a guide to the site, Getting Started with Active Learning, was developed.

In 2016 Texas School for the Blind & Visually Impaired and the LID collaborated in a pilot, Developing District Capacity in Active Learning (DDCAL). Initially four regional education service centers joined this pilot which was meant to simultaneously help train the ESC consultants to support districts in utilizing an Active Learning approach and to work with specific districts to implement Active Learning on their campuses. In year two of the pilot, four additional ESCs joined the pilot and other regions began to use some of these training approaches to provide their own training.

After year two of the pilot, participants requested that a series of online self-paced courses be developed covering the content of the Active Learning Space. In 2018 this work began with the creation of two courses, Active Learning Principles and the Active Learning Functional Scheme (Dr. Lilli Nielsen’s Assessment).
At the beginning of the school year in 2018, the LID and the Statewide Leadership Services for Blind and Visually Impaired (SLSBVI) lent their support in funding the development of five additional courses and a “train the trainer” workshop and materials for those individuals who are providing training on Active Learning. These courses included:

- Program Planning
- Implementation
- Documenting Progress
- Equipment
- Materials

Now, in 2019, we have completed a series of powerpoint presentations and supplemental handouts along with a manual for ESC LID and SLSBVI consultants and others to use in providing training on Active Learning in their regions. These materials are meant to be used in face-to-face workshops, but may also be used as part of a flipped learning approach in training teams of individual to implement Active Learning.

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Kate Moss Hurst, Education Consultant
Texas School for the Blind & Visually Impaired Outreach Programs
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