Instruction Strategies

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We all want our students to become critical thinkers and problem solvers. As teachers we can make this a reality by using the most appropriate instructional strategy in the classroom. We must bear in mind that not all students are the same and they learn differently. Using the most appropriate instructional strategy within the classroom is an attempt to meet all the learning styles of the students. According to Alberta Learning (2002),” *learning strategies are techniques teachers use to help students become independent, strategic learners* (p.1)”. Teachers use instructional strategies to motivate students and help them focus attention; organize information for understanding and remembering; and monitor and assess students learning. For students to become successful strategic learners, teachers much provide step by step instructions to guide students; provide instructional materials and strategies; provide the opportunity for students to transfer skills and ideas from one situation to another; and most importantly provide meaningful connections between skills and ideas, and real-life situations. Instructional strategies are needed for students to succeed and for teachers to deliver effective lessons. Teachers can utilize several strategies to achieve their learning objectives such some of these are hands-on learning, simulation, music and songs and think pair share.

One way in which a teacher can effectively execute his/her lesson and engage their students no matter the learning style is through hands-on learning. Hands-on learning according to Alberta Learning (2002), is an educational strategy that directly involves learners by encouraging them to do something in order to learn about it. It is learning by doing. For example, is a teacher librarian is teaching the students of a class how to locate books in their school library by using the catalogues. It would be best for the teacher librarian to take the students to the library and allow them to use the online cataloguing system and or the manual card catalogue. This way the students are able to search for items themselves and going to the shelves to retrieve them.

Many people argue that doing something is the best way to learn about it, rather than attempting to learn about it from a book. Hands-on learning allows students to directly observe and understand what is happening or what they should know. This is a very successful way to teach kinesthetic learners, who learn best by example. It is often hard to properly understand something you have never directly seen or experienced, like teaching grade seven students about card catalogues, which most of these students have never seen or come in contact with before. This is why today hands-on learning has become more popular in education - there are more vocational courses that provide work experience than ever before. Hands-on encourages students to do things for themselves, which help with the development of independent learning which is an important life skill (Sumil, 2016). Therefore, using the hands-on instructional strategy allows for students to be engage no matter the subject being taught.

However, there are downsides to this instructional strategy. Demonstrations usually give students the main idea of how something works, but less emphasis is placed on details. Students who wish to attain the highest grades, most likely will need to do some additional reading on the subject for a deeper understanding. Often times, students make the mistake of not doing additional reading after they have learned the basics, which reflect negatively on their grades. For example, the hands-on approach is in close relation to the field experience or field trips. If the teacher librarian who is teaching about the types of library, decides that he/she will be taking the students on trips to visit each type may find it hard because of high cost and time consuming (Sumil, 2016). Using the hands-on method to actively engage students with enhance their educational experience. However, it is more effective coupled with some traditional learning from books especially for those at higher educational levels.

Another instructional strategy that teachers may utilize to execute their lesson is simulation. Instructional simulations have the potential to engage students in extensive learning that permits understanding as opposed to superficial learning that requires memorization for passing exams/tests. According to UNSW Sydney (2015), simulation is an instructional scenario where the learner is placed in a "world" defined by the teacher. They represent a reality within which students interact. The teacher controls the parameters of this "world" and uses it to achieve the desired instructional results. Students experience the reality of the scenario and gather meaning from it. An example, as mentioned above, is where students are now going out in the field to practice. Stimulation is the preferred strategy to use in a lot of fields such as medical, education and sports etc. One way in which a teacher librarian may utilize this approach to teach her students is to use scenarios to get the students to understand the content being taught. For example, if the teacher librarian is teaching directory, particularly the types of directories, she/he could use scenarios to get the students to analyze the scenario so that they are able to ask and answer key questions as to what type of directory is used in a particular situation.

Another example could be that the teacher librarian is teaching Dewy decimal classification system and where to locate materials. A simulation could be that two students goes to the library and they are to organize given materials on the shelf after which patrons (other students) would come in and try to locate the item base on the DDC. if the students portraying the role of the librarians did not organized the items correctly on the shelf the patrons may have a hard time locating such items. A simulation is a form of experiential learning. It is a strategy that fits well with the principles of Student-Centred and constructivist learning and teaching. A simulation in the form of a game could be for example, pin the card in the column (pin the tail on a donkey), where the teacher librarian is teaching his/her students about card catalogued and after watching a video, the students are given a sample of various types of catalogue card and a three-column table is drawn up on the board labeled title, author and subject. The first child will be pin the card base on the catalogue it belongs wins. Through the use of simulation, the students are actively engaged, having fun and most importantly learning without even knowing.

In addition, because simulation is a controlled representation of reality it helps develop self-confidence among students as it relates to them understanding the basic concept of what is expected of them to know; this also allows students to connect theory with practice for example, learning about cataloguing systems by theory is different from going on a computer and actually manipulating the system; with simulation students are able to analyze a problem or situation and come up with a solution and if something goes wrong the student is able to make corrections; simulation also aid in developing students efficiency due to experience; and through role playing students are able to develop critical thinking skills. On the other hand, students may not want to take the role playing or scenarios seriously; it need supervision and guidance; and simulation often portray situation in a simple way, which in general, are very complex and difficult (UNSW Sydney, 2015).

Another instructional strategy that teachers can use in the classroom to effectively execute their lesson is music and songs. Music and songs have been popular since day one of ABCs and this technique is still very popular today. The music and songs technique are best suited for students who have problem remembering information which often result in low scores in benchmark tests. Music play a big role in influencing young people. Youths tend to listen to music more than they watch television or even communicate with friends. “According to Teenage Research Unlimited, teenagers spend an average of 20 hours a week listening to music twice as much as they do watching television” (Lindsay, 1999). It is becoming a common practice among teachers to use rhyme and rhythm to help enhance students’ recall and retention of certain information (Wolfe, 2001).

Popular songs can be used communicate important information to students of varying upbringing by creating meaningful connections such as student interest and subject content for memorization. For example, the teacher librarian wishes to teach her/his class about the dewy decimal classification system, instead of drilling students to remember difficult subject areas and numbers, the lyrics to a reggae song can be manipulated to create new lyrics to familiar melodies. A song like Chronixs ‘Likes’ could be used to create a new song about how to use Dewy decimal classification to locate subjects in a library’s collection. This will have the students singing along in no time to the rich imagery and metaphor that links both home life and school life. Using music allows student to use imagination and creativity to personalize information. Singing along to catchy tunes, will enable students to pick up vocabulary, grammatical structures, and the rhythm of the language more easily than trying to read it or study it from a course book. Not only does music and songs benefits student’s academic performance, it encourages students to use creative ways to repeat and ingrain information that was already taught (Wolfe, 2001). There are many different lesson ideas for using this technique such as sing along, musical chair just to name a few. Music and songs can be used to Music can be used to:

* Maintain students’ attention and concentration
* Encourage interaction and facilitate positive relationships within the classroom
* Create appropriate emotional connections to the information being taught, enabling triggers for recall
* Motivate and inspire students
* Raise students’ energy levels

However, music and songs in a classroom may have a few downsides such as teachers not taking music seriously and are not able to execute lessons appropriately. It can disturb other learners in nearby classrooms. Teachers can also can lose control of students easily. Therefore, as teachers, it is important for teachers to know their students and chose the most appropriate strategy for executing their lessons.

Another instructional strategy that teachers can use to execute an effective lesson is the jigsaw technique. The jigsaw technique is a strategy used to organize classroom activity that makes students dependent on each other to succeed. It breaks classes into groups and breaks assignments into pieces that the group assembles to complete the (jigsaw) puzzle. For example, the students in a library skills class are divided into small groups of five or six students each. The task would for them to learn the parts of a book (preliminary pages). In one jigsaw group, student1 is responsible for researching on the title page; student 2 is to research the copyright page; student 3 is assigned acknowledgement; student 4 is to research introduction; student 5 covers the abstract and student 6 handle the table of contents. To ensure that the research information is accurate each student meet with the students in the class outside of their jigsaw group that has the same topic to research. For example, students assigned table of contents will meet in an expert group to clarify information and practice presenting. After the readings and meeting each student come back to his/her jigsaw group and present the findings to the group. This is done in a way that the only access other group members have to this information is through listening closely to the findings that are being presented. Students will then be tested on what they have learned on whichever part of the book they were assigned (jigsaw, 2014).

The jigsaw process encourages listening, engagement, and empathy by giving each member of the group an essential part to play in the academic activity. Group members must work together as a team to accomplish a common goal; each person depends on all the others. No student can succeed completely unless everyone works well together as a team.  On the other hand, the jigsaw method has some disadvantages which include misunderstanding the content and a lack of participation. It is possible that group of students researching could get distracted and be led down a path not intended by the teacher. This could lead to the whole group not learning the correct information and, in turn, be behind the rest of the class. Another problem in any group situation is when a student does not hold his/her weight in the responsibilities. A lack of participation by one or more student in a group would lead to either, the other students in the group having to cover his/her material and having to more work or, the group being without that student's responsibility. Both of these would hinder the group's productivity rather than help them learn in a different way (jigsaw, 2014).

As mentioned before we as teachers we want all our students to become problem solvers and critical thinkers, this can be achieved by using the think, pair, share (TPS) cooperative learning strategy. According to Theobald (2011), The think, pair, share strategy is a cooperative learning technique in which students think through questions using three distinct steps, encouraging individual participation. This is an excellent method for promoting critical thinking and articulate communication in the classroom. TPS is a strategy that can be used in many situations. It can be a quick one to five-minute conversation between two students about a chunk of learning or a longer session with more in depth thinking, discussion, and note taking. A teacher might provide a thinking break in a lesson by providing an invitation for paired students to converse with each other. The process first involves a "quiet" time for each student to collect their thoughts and possibly make notes.

This thinking time will vary depending upon the content and goals of the teacher and students. Though TPS is usually around five minutes, longer sessions of ten or even twenty minutes can work toward student's understanding of content. The goal of the TPS strategy is for the students to have a genuine discussion about their thoughts and the reading. Thus, students should not simply tell each what they think. They should debate, coach, point out passages, and truly have a conversation about what they are thinking and learning. After the pairs have conversed for the allotted time, they can share with other pairs or with the class as a whole. Because of the flexibility of TPS, it can be used in a variety of ways with a variety of prompts (Robb, 2003).

In keeping with the example mentions earlier, if a teacher librarian wishes to deliver the topic parts of a book-preliminary pages in a different way to another class he/she is able seat the class in groups of six and ensure students are able to move around easily. Each student would receive a handout about three preliminary pages. The teacher librarian may then give them quiet time to read for about five-six minutes. After which the teacher librarian will then ask students to go around and discuss what they have learned about the preliminary pages on the handout. Then when the allotted time is up the teacher librarian can ask the students to share what they now know with the class to generate a class discussion. This technique is similar to jigsaw method however, instead of a group, students work in pairs. One can guarantee that with the think pair share method, there is total involvement of students; it generates a lot of ideas quickly; and because of the small group quality discussion can be expected. On the contrast, the classroom using this method may be very noisy and put pressure on some students.

There are many instructional strategies out there that teachers can use to execute an effective lesson. there is no perfect technique, as a teacher you must know your students and have an idea what best they will respond to. For me I like discussions and seeing students work independently and in groups. I love when students are engaged in the lesson and bring new ideas to the table. The five strategies above reflect how I want to interact with my students in the classroom. As mentioned before there is not right or wrong technique just know your students, exercise classroom management, and choose the most appropriate technique and your lesson will be executed effectively.

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