

20 Ways to Make Instruction More Effective

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Intervention in School and Clinic, Vol. 35, No. 3., pp. 183-184 January 2000

Three explosions are simultaneously vibrating through our schools and classrooms. **First** is an explosion of content information to be taught. **Second** is an increased emphasis on student learning outcomes. **Third** is the growing number of students with learning and attention difficulties who struggle with grasping new concepts and retaining information over time. Consider the following instructional strategies, which are designed to maintain student interest, maximize student engagement, and optimize the memory of content information over time.

1. Grab their attention. Employ a variety of introductory activities or "attention grabbers" to stimulate student interest in the learning task. Stress ways that the content to be taught is meaningful or applicable to students' lives and outside interests.

2. Make it relevant. State a clear purpose and objective for each lesson. Tell students exactly what you expect them to be able to accomplish following each teaching segment. Stress goal attainment so that students recognize and take pride in their own progress.

3. Do it together. Stress the active engagement of students in their learning process. Encourage them to correct their own mistakes and to learn from them. Use any mistakes that you make as "teachable moments." Encourage cooperation rather than competition so students seek ways to be coaches and study buddies for one another.

4. Try teams. Utilize the social needs of your students for added motivation. Many students will work harder for the success of a peer group than they would when working alone. Use learning teams whose members are rotated regularly. Students can practice the interpersonal skills required to work effectively with different individuals as they achieve essential learning outcomes.

5. Take aim. Teach goal setting and encourage students to set their own realistic goals. You can help by providing a realistic range (e.g., "Tell me how many paragraphs you will write today. I'll guess you can write between two and six paragraphs during one class period"). These short-term goals are easily met, yet are stepping stones to larger achievements.

6. Keep it visual. Teach students to monitor and graph their progress toward the goals that they select. Simple graphs provide excellent visual displays and documentation of

student progress. As an added benefit, these graphs are good learning activities in themselves.

7. Create a schemata. Take time to explore students' prior knowledge before teaching a new concept or skill. Become an expert in creating bridges from students' past experience to new learning. Emphasize ways that new content relates to students' prior knowledge as well as to content that you have presented in class.

8. Think big. Stress the relationship and use graphics to visually display the link between superordinate concepts or global ideas. Less skilled learners, in particular, may fail to see the relationship between topics unless these are stated explicitly.

9. Draw it out. Employ a variety of graphic organizers. Charts, diagrams, maps, and semantic webs are examples of visual displays that are useful for facilitating learning and memory. Generic templates can be easily modified for use across content areas.

10. Show them how. Provide numerous examples, models, and illustrations of the new concept or skill. Be sure to include more complex problems as well as some straightforward examples. Ask students to create additional problems for each other and for the class.

11. Stimulate the cognitive. Use "think-alouds" as you demonstrate the steps to a new process or procedure. Tell students exactly what you are thinking and why as you employ each step. The key is to verbalize explicitly those self-regulating cues that you would normally perform automatically. Consider the needs of skill "novices" and try to prevent areas of difficulty with specific instruction.

12. Teach a trick. Stress the use of mnemonic techniques for improved memory. In some cases, first-letter acrostics may be devised (e.g., ROYGBV for the colors of the rainbow: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, violet). In other cases, keyword mnemonics may be used for associative information. To remember that Taft was president when federal mail service was established, select a keyword that is familiar to students (e.g., raft sounds like Taft). Second, think of an interaction between the word and the answer (e.g., picture a mailbag floating on a raft). Use the steps to recall Taft and the establishment of mail service.

13. Talk out loud. Coach students to elaborate as they reason through topics that follow logical sequences or action-reaction formats. Encourage students to problem-solve by asking probing questions-"Why does it make sense that. . ." or, "The fishing industry is big business in ... ?"

14. Build on what they know. Use scaffolded learning by providing very detailed instruction and materials during early learning. Offer less scaffolding as learners become more skillful with the content. Once you have modeled a procedure on

numerous occasions, you can prompt students to become more independent in their use of this technique.

15. Keep the action going. Employ a variety of methods for actively involving students in practicing their new skills. Small dry-erase boards and individual chalk or game boards provide excellent opportunities for guided practice and allow additional feedback to students.

16. Make a note. Teach students to take lecture notes using a series of guided steps. For the earliest lessons in note taking, provide a structured outline that requires students to fill in the blanks. In subsequent lessons, gradually decrease the amount of information that you provide and require increased levels of student input.

17. Think ahead. Encourage students to make predictions, to summarize, and to monitor their comprehension as they read independently. After direct instruction of these reading strategies, students can be prompted to use and practice comprehension skills across content areas.

18. Practice, practice, practice. Provide lots of opportunities for students to practice a new skill. These can take the form of coaching activities (e.g., "Tell your buddy." "Show the person on the left." "Read to your partner.") or other relevant practice methods.

19. Clinch new learning. Use specific closure activities to complete a learning segment or lesson (e.g., "Tell two important things you learned today." "Summarize in one sentence what you learned about. . . ." "Before the bell we have just enough time to name the steps we learned today.").

20. Refresh their memories. Provide systematic review for the content you teach. Even the most motivating instruction will not be remembered unless it is reviewed in a systematic way. Research supports the use of distributed rather than massed practice. Devise a schedule of weekly review sessions and be sure to include games or other activity-based formats.

If you have any questions about learning disabilities, adult attention deficit disorder, or other disabilities and how they affect learning, contact LASC-DSPS Office 323-241-5480.

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