

Utilizing Innovative Instructional Strategies Towards More Learner-Friendly Teaching and Learning

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Abstract *The paper focuses on instructional strategies that not only involves the learner but generally makes the teaching and learning environment challenging, stimulating and meaningful. A number of such innovative techniques that are learner friendly were discussed pointing out some possible ways of utilizing them for specific instructional purposes. The key issue of learner-centeredness and it's hallmarks were highlighted in the discussion while major constraints such as limited facilities, large classes and structured syllabus were noted. However the paper emphasized the role of interest and commitment towards reducing the effects of these constraints.*

Key words: *Utilizing, Innovative, instructional Strategies, Learner- friendly.*

Introduction

Teaching has to do with helping individuals acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes in different areas of learning. Teaching is guiding, facilitating and motivating learners. The aim of teaching is not only to transmit information but also to transform passive students into active receptors of knowledge and constructors of their own knowledge. The individuals or groups of learners that may be involved obviously vary in their background, abilities, aptitudes and learning styles. In addition, the circumstances or learning environments in which the teaching and learning take place may incorporate a wide array of challenges. These factors therefore suggest that for teaching to be effective, a number of options in terms of approaches, strategies and skills to be utilized must be considered if optimal teaching and learning must be achieved. In other words, no single approach or method can be said to be the most effective always,

Many of us in our practice as teachers give the impression that the traditional teaching with the "chalk and talk" approach is the only option available to us. This is far from the truth First, traditional teaching (ie chalk and talk method) is not the only option. Secondly and very importantly traditional teaching is not an effective mode of instruction for most students and does not provide adequate conceptual understanding. According to Stice (cited in Piccinin 1997) students remember 10% of what they read, 26% of what they listen to, 30% of what they see and listen to, 70% of what they say and 90% of what they say as they do something. This study clearly indicates that students may only learn about 50% from the "chalk and talk" teaching method. The truth therefore is that no matter how articulately we deliver lectures in the classroom, more effective learning will take place if students are also intelligently active.

This paper looks at different instructional strategies utilized to ensure more effective and interesting teaching and learning. Indeed a large number of such pedagogies have been developed by scholars and tried out but it is not possible to have an exhaustive discussion of such techniques given the limitations of space. We shall therefore focus briefly on the following with a view to highlighting their main features and strong points.

- Project based learning
- Peer teaching
- Dramatization/role play
- Use of field trips
- Demonstrations

- Multimedia based learning
- Computers based multimedia
- Concept formation.
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1) Project-based Learning Project based learning provides an opportunity for many learners to be involved and active in learning. Carefully chosen projects related to particular subjects are given to individuals or groups of students. For example students may be assigned to gather information relating to different cultural events. Some students may be assigned to carry out quantitative or qualitative analysis of water from the Local stream. By so doing individual interest will be harnessed and a more permanent learning experience may be achieved. The prerequisites of learner centredness is that the learner should be given opportunity to process information, solve problems and make his own decisions (Blumenfeld et al, 1991.)

Onuebunwa (2005) categorized project learning as a learner-friendly strategy which combines learners interest, his capabilities and needs resulting most of the time in optimal motivation.

2) Peer Teaching Different topics may be assigned to individual members of the class to teach to the whole class. Of course to do this effectively involves a lot of preparation on the part of the individual students. Experience has shown that a lot more permanent learning can be achieved in the course of this preparation. In addition to this, many students appear to gain substantially from learning from their peer teachers. As much as possible the selection of subjects they want to teach should be left for them for greater efficiency.

3) Dramatization/Role Play Dramatization and role play can be used effectively as techniques for enhancing teaching and learning. Dramatization and role play can be used to convey ideas that may be by their nature abstract or symbolic.

For example in social studies, unity as a concept can be taught effectively by dramatization. The need for controlled family size can be differently taught using role play. Experiences in the past can be reconstructed using role play or dramatization. By so doing the learner is brought closer to such realities that are no longer available at first hand.

It is important to note that although dramatization and role play are actually substitutes for the real thing, they may have certain teaching advantages over the real life situation. These include the fact that it can eliminate insignificant elements that merely distract attention while sharpening and stressing the truly important ideas. Thus the experiences can be manipulated for teaching purposes. We must distinguish between participating in a dramatization and watching it. Both experiences are useful but a students who plays a part in dramatized reconstruction gets closer to direct experience than his classmate who merely looks on.

4. Use of Field Trips Another important technique or strategy that is becoming neglected in our environment is fieldtrips. When properly planned with the objectives clearly set out, field trips provide learning opportunities devoid of the highly structured classroom environment. The field trip is undertaken primarily for the purpose of experiencing something that cannot be encountered within the classroom. Whether we call it excursion or school journey, it provides opportunities to encounter, certain events, process or environments and efforts should be put in place to make the most of it for the learner. Learners should therefore be encouraged to ask questions or raise issues.

A nearby rubber or palm plantation, the local welder's workshop, or a refinery, may be good destinations for field trips. However, the onus lies on the teacher to ensure that the permissions where necessary are sought and obtained. It is important to emphasize that the resources in the community outside the four walls of the school constitute a key component of the resources available for the teacher to improve his instructions. Field trips constitute one major way of utilizing these resources.

5) Demonstration: Although demonstrations are expected to be part of the usual class work, experience shows that many teachers hardly incorporate them in their lessons or even in the so called practical classes hence the need to focus on demonstrations as a technique. A demonstration is a practicalized explanation of an important fact, idea or process. A demonstration shows how certain things are done. For example, a science teacher demonstrates separation of electrolytic products. A football coach show the team how to throw or block a pass. Demonstrations sometimes may require nothing more than observation on the part of students but often times the learner may be required to do what he has just been shown. Whether the demonstration is followed by such performance depends on what we expect the students to learn. The important point to note is that the techniques of demonstration should feature in our teaching if students must have a clear practicalized picture of what is involved in the execution of learning tasks in the psychomotor domain.

6) Multimedia Based Learning A wide range of instructional media is available for improving teaching and learning. Apart from making learning meaningful and concrete instructional media generally diversify the sensory modalities through which learning takes place and makes the learning environment more interesting and interactive. This can happen when these media are effectively utilized. Instructional media that are easily available include pictures, charts, illustrations, audio tapes, videotapes, compact discs, video compact discs, slides etc. These can be used individually for instruction or in combination with others. For example a multimedia package on food chain may involve a chart showing the food chain, slide and on audio sequence. Although the emergence of information and communications technology appears to have taken over some of the roles, the easy availability and low cost of some of the instructional media (e.g chart, audio tape, CD's) still give them an advantage in rural settings especially in a developing Country like ours. The low availability of ready made media resources calls for improvisation of these materials to improve teaching and learning in our schools. Fortunately our environment abounds with resources that can be effectively utilized for improvisation. (Onuebunwa, 2008). The onus therefore lies on individual teacher to resolve to channel his efforts towards using these resources to meet his instructional needs. Student efforts have been involved in producing useable instructional media with positive result.

7) Computer Based Multimedia Information and communications technology has made available a range of computer based multimedia which are able to integrate voice video and computer technologies. Such faculties include, video conferencing which play useful roles in distance education. With access to the internet increasing individuals, schools and organizations are linking up and opening up more possibilities for learners to gain full advantage of the networked world. Distance learning has indeed been greatly enhanced by the internet and it's associated service. To improve students skills in the use of information and communications technology, assignments requiring the use of the internet can be given occasionally to the students. There is the tendency for teachers to overemphasize the limited availability of these facilities but many young learners have shown that their interest in the internet and motivation constitute a strong force in overcoming the limitations associated with availability.

8) Concept Formation: In concept formation, students are provided with data about a particular concept. These data may be generated by the teacher or by the students. Students are encouraged to classify or group the information and give descriptive labels to their groupings. By linking the examples to the labels and by explaining their reasoning, the students form their own understanding of the concept.

Concept formation provides students with an opportunity to explore key ideas by making connections and seeing relationships between items of information. This method can help students develop and refine their ability to recall and discriminate among key ideas, see commonalities and identity relationships, formulate concepts and generalizations, organize data and to explain how they have organized data. Concept formation lessons can be highly motivational because students are provided with an opportunity to participate

in their own learning. It helps the students to organize and manipulate information from other lessons and contexts in new ways.

Summary and Conclusion

The job of the teacher requires that he assists the learner to learn. The teacher can do this effectively by making the teaching/learning environment, stimulating, challenging and dynamic. The instructional strategies we have briefly highlighted can assist the learner reduce the monotony associated with using only the "chalk and talk" option. As earlier mentioned the techniques mentioned are by no means exhaustive. The teacher can initiate new and interesting approaches that will make the teaching learning environment much more stimulating. The common thread that runs among the pedagogies outlined is the tendency to promote learner centeredness. The prerequisite of learner-centredness is that the learner should be given opportunity to process information, solve problems and make decisions on his own. As Gibbs (1992) emphasized, the issues of greater autonomy, control of choice of study constitute key hallmarks of learner-centred learning. There are definitely such constraints as limited facilities, large classes and the structured syllabus that need to be covered. Interest and commitment will go a long way in reducing the effects of these constraints.

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