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Toward Inclusiveness In Classrooms

This website is dedicated to promoting inclusive schooling and exploring positive ways of supporting students with autism and other disabilities. Most of my work involves collaborating with schools to create environments, lessons, and experiences that are inclusive, respectful, and accessible for all learners.

Readings



Don't Lecture Me!

5 Ways to Keep Whole Class Instruction Active & Memorable

In a differentiated classroom, students can expect to experience a wide range of strategies, learning experiences, and approaches. These strategies, formats, experiences, and approaches include, but are not limited to, cooperative learning, partner work, peer tutoring, drama, simulations, group problem solving, self-directed learning, project-based instruction, and games. Of course, even in the least traditional and most active classrooms, students can also expect to see whole-class discussions and lectures.

Keeping Whole Class Instruction Active & Memorable

A common misconception teachers have is that lecturing or whole class instruction is discouraged in the differentiated classroom. While it is true that these formats should not be the centerpiece of classroom instruction, lectures and whole class lesson delivery certainly have a place in the diverse, inclusive classroom. It is important to realize, however, that in order to reach different types of learners, teachers may need to be choosy about how and when to use lecture techniques and may want to explore a range of strategies for keeping this traditional form of instruction lively, engaging, and comprehensible. Five such strategies are offered in this article.

1. Show and Tell

One of my colleagues teaches longitude and latitude by slicing up an orange in front of her students. Another, a high school biology teacher, uses plastic models of the human body to illustrate key concepts. And still another, an elementary math teacher, jumps to different digits on a huge number line (one that covers the entire front of the classroom) to physically act out solutions to problems he is explaining.

Some students may not be able to follow a lecture at all without related visual supports and most others will be more engaged and interested if there are props, notes, diagrams, photos, models, or illustrations that support the content. By simply scanning lesson plans and asking, "How can I show, demonstrate, or illustrate this concept or lesson?", you may come up with fresh ideas you had not previously considered. Or engage in this planning process in reverse! One group of teachers I taught with had a habit of looking for outrageous items (e.g., purple confetti, magic wands, singing fish toys) in the local dime store and seeking ways to integrate the objects into their lessons!

In addition to props, models, and supplementary materials, you may also need a way to allow students to see ideas as you present them-especially if you are asking students to learn and remember a particular process, event, chronology, set of steps, or list of items. For this type of lecture, many educators are using PowerPoint technology in addition to or as a replacement for the blackboard or overhead projector. PowerPoint is a nice option because it is easy to quickly add content during the lecture and it allows teachers to create their lecture materials once and refine them over time as their audience changes and as the content itself needs to be revised. Additionally, creating note sets for students is as easy as hitting the print button on the computer and these

notes can easily be adapted for the needs of diverse learners by using images and colors and by changing the amount of text or information on each slide. Tech savvy teachers may also want to check out www.prezi.com and www.animoto.com for alternatives to Power Point that many learners will find captivating.

2. Keep Them Talking

In a well-known study, Ruhl, Hughes, and Schloss (1987) set out to explore what happens when students are given structured opportunities to make meaning of classroom content. In the study, two groups of university students received the same instruction in two different ways. In the experimental group, an instructor paused for two minutes on three occasions (intervals between pauses were approximately fifteen minutes) during each of five lectures. During the pauses, while students worked in pairs to discuss and rework their notes, no interaction occurred between instructor and students. At the end of each lecture, students were given three minutes to write down everything they could remember from the lesson. Then, twelve days after the last lecture, students were also given a multiple-choice test to measure long-term retention. A control group received the same lectures as those in the “pause procedure” group and was similarly tested. The results of the study were telling. Students who experienced more interaction and were more involved in the learning process did significantly better on the daily assessments and on the final multiple-choice test. In fact, the magnitude of the difference in mean scores between the two groups was large enough to make a difference of two letter grades. This study suggests, therefore, that if teachers talk less (even six minutes less as in the aforementioned study) students can learn more!

One quick and easy way to provide such opportunities is to implement a “turn and talk” technique. At certain intervals in the lecture, ask students to turn to the person next to them (or assign partners in advance) and discuss the content just presented. To make the exercise even more purposeful, you might give students a specific prompt. For instance:

- Ask your partner a question about _____;
- Paraphrase what I just taught; or
- Share the most interesting thing you just learned.

3. Keep Them Moving

Many learners do their best work when they are moving. These are the students who often wiggle in their chair or tap their foot while the teacher is trying to lecture. If you have several students like this in your classroom, you may want to create more opportunities for active learning during your lectures. “Stop the Lecture & Start the Drama” (Udvari-Solner & Kluth, 2008) is one technique teachers can use to blend lecture and movement. To engage in this humorous and easy-to-implement activity, simply assign students to engage in a short role-play or skit at specific points in the lesson. These quickly-planned sketches can be a serious rendition of important facts or can be developed as parodies and satires of a situation. This activity works best to illustrate events, demonstrate roles of critical figures in history, or to show the process of a tangible sequence. Props are optional! Examples in a history class might be to replay moments in history like the Montgomery Bus Boycott or the building of the pyramids. Examples in an elementary math class might be to have students demonstrate addition, subtraction, or the creation of sets and subsets.

You can also give opportunities for movement by simply asking students to respond to lecture questions or statements in more active ways. Students can respond to the question, “What is $1/2$ of $1/2$?”, for instance, by using:

- mini-chalkboards or mini-wipe boards;
- a physical response (e.g., walk to the front of the room if you think the answer is $1/2$; walk to the back of the room if you think the answer is $1/4$; and stay where you are if you are not sure);
- pre-made cards (e.g., all students have cards with $1/2$, $1/4$, and $1/8$ on their desks and they hold one of them up in response to teacher questions).

4. Try Note Taking Alternatives

Instead of expecting students to sit quietly and listen, give them a way to respond to the material presented. Taking notes is one way to do this, of course, but you may find that students tire of the same routine day after day. Variations on note taking include allowing students to take notes in pairs (one student writes down a comment and passes it to his partner, that student jots down a note and passes the paper back), letting them take visual or picture notes (you can ask students to take continuous notes or simply stop at regular intervals and ask learners to draw images of what they just heard), and giving them ideas for coding their written notes (e.g., putting a ? by points they need more information about; putting a “check” by ideas they deem most important). Or surprise them occasionally and have them take notes on paper table cloths, lunch bags, or placemats.

5. Co-Teach with the Class

Either formally (by bringing students to the front of the room to discuss a few points) or informally (by calling on individuals to share perspectives) enlist the help of your students as you teach. This will not only inspire learning but fun as well. To be sure that they are prepared to share content, you might ask different students to prepare mini-presentations at various times during the year or simply give learners “cheat sheets” to read before they get to the front of the classroom. Or you can simply look for co-teaching support as you lecture by asking questions to the whole group that will help you determine which learners have more expertise in certain areas than others. For instance, when an art teacher learned that one of her students had just returned from a summer trip to Barcelona (and to the Picasso Museum) she asked him to come to the front to talk for a few moments about his experiences.

References

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Udvari-Solner, A. & Kluth, P. (2008). *Joyful learning: Active and collaborative learning in inclusive classrooms*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

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