

EDG11 Professional Standards II

The heart of a lesson

Choosing the 'right' teaching strategy

After you have introduced a lesson, the next step is to choose a strategy (or strategies) which you can use to achieve your learning objectives. A good strategy is one which can assist your students achieve the lesson learning objective(s).

When choosing teaching strategies to use, focus on your learning objectives and base your choice of strategies on them!

The effectiveness of your lesson is not measured by the creativity of your strategy but by how well your students achieved the learning objectives. Therefore, when deciding on the strategy to use, you need to ask yourself, "Is this the best approach for achieving the learning objectives?"

Sometimes, we focus too much on how we teach a lesson that we forget to consider our lesson objectives.

The following includes a variety of strategies that many teachers use:

Teacher exposition (Expository techniques)

In this technique, the teacher verbally presents information to students. The main purpose of this strategy is to present information quickly and meaningfully as possible. Examples of teacher exposition are lectures and presentations.

In many expository classes, the teacher presents information in the following steps:

- I. sets the scene (lesson opening),
- II. describes, explains, discusses ideas/concepts,
- III. students work on some activities,
- IV. teacher checks for understanding (connecting to context).

The disadvantages of this technique include:

- it can be boring (especially to young students and to those who do not have limited prior knowledge of the subject);

- students have very little opportunity to get actively involved or have hands-on experience. As a result, this technique should not be used to teach social or manipulative skills;
- since it is predominantly didactic and teacher-centred, it is difficult to cater for individual differences (diversity of learning styles/preferences, etc)

As a consequence, this strategy is used mainly with older students and in lessons in which the purpose is mainly to disseminate information (ideas, facts, concepts).

To maximize student learning in expository lessons, you must consider the following:

- it should not be too long; focus only on a few ideas;
- you must know your stuff;
- present ideas in small steps, from concrete to abstract;
- the age, maturity, and prior-learning of your students. It's a bad mistake to overwhelm or underwhelm your students;
- make it interesting, lively, and enthusiastic;
- engage students as much as you can.
- Ask rhetorical questions to engage their thinking;
- occasionally ask for their views; comment on students responses; ask students to comment on other students' responses.

Demonstration

In this approach, the teacher explains and demonstrates a skill, process, or procedure, to the students, who then practice it until they have mastered it. The purpose of this technique is to promote the learning of skills (or behaviour or content) through observation and imitation.

This approach can also be divided into 4 steps:

- I. sets the scene (lesson opening),
- II. explaining and demonstrating the skill/procedure or process.
- III. students practice on some activities (with teacher as guide and to provide immediate feedback);
- IV. the teacher checks for understanding (applying skill in new situations).

Disadvantages: As the students imitate what the teacher is demonstrating, it is obviously that a major disadvantage of this approach is that there is little room for independent learning.

If your planning for such activities does not leave adequate room for creativity and problem-solving, such highly structured lessons can easily become dull and routine.

Demonstrations are commonly used with young students and in learning areas where certain behaviours and manipulative skills are important (e.g. in Physical Education, Science, Music, etc).

For effective demonstration lessons, you need to consider the following advice:

- The content is appropriate to the maturity, ability, and interests of your students;
- Your explanation must be clear and concise, and your students are able to hear and see you;
- If possible, repeat the demonstration or demonstrate the skill in a different way;
- engage students as much as you can and make sure that students are thinking about what is being demonstrated; explain every step and make sure students understand what is being done;
- praise students' effort.

Inductive teaching (Guided discovery or exploratory learning)

In this strategy, the teacher begins the lesson by presenting students with a specific challenge (e.g. a scenario or case study to analyse, some experimental data to interpret, or a complex real-world problem to solve). Through careful observation, probing, and discussion, the students are carefully guided to realise what they need to know in order to solve the challenge.

The end result is that students 'discover' the answer to the challenge on their own.

An inductive lesson can be divided into four steps:

- I. The students are presented with a specific challenge (e.g. experimental data to interpret, a case study to analyse, or a set of diagrams to interpret, etc).
- II. The students are asked to observe patterns, raise questions, or construct theories based on observation.
- III. As students wrestle with the challenge at hand, they quickly recognise the need for facts, skills, and conceptual understanding.
- IV. The teacher then skillfully provides additional information to facilitate the students' construction of their own understanding.

The major purpose of inductive teaching is to help students organize and categorise information or experience into a meaningful intellectual framework (Barry & King, 1998).

Disadvantages

Although this method promotes higher-order thinking and independent learning, a major disadvantage is that, many students would find it conceptually challenging to follow. Further, when students are not carefully guided, this strategy is more likely (than others) to arouse student resistance and interpersonal conflicts (Prince & Felder, 2007).

For effective inductive lessons, you might consider the following advice:

- The target concept/idea must be worthwhile to the students' lives and future learning;
- Explicit instructions and guidance are provided to students before and while they are addressing the challenge;
- The students have concrete examples to relate to;
- Students are actively involved.

Structured group discussion

In this is a type of discussion, the teacher identifies a theme to focus the discussion on. The students are then grouped, and each group is assigned with a set of questions to respond to and report on.

This strategy has the following advantages:

- It fosters communication skills;
- It promotes critical thinking and decision-making skills;
- It promotes tolerance of differing viewpoints.

The major disadvantages of this strategy include:

- It is not suitable to young students because of the level of reasoning that is required.
- Success is dependent on effective group routines and social climate of the class;
- Lesson is more likely to be ineffective if students are not well-trained in group discussion techniques (due to uncooperative or disruptive students).

For a group discussion to be effective, the following ideas need to be considered:

- Students must be familiar with group organization and routines;
- The class is cooperative;
- The theme is appropriate to the age, ability, and interests of the students;
- Specific time-frame is set for group tasks;
- Group tasks are carefully monitored by teacher;
- Constant guidance by teacher;