

DEVELOPING LEARNING RESOURCES

Visual-aids in the Classroom

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What is a Visual-Aid?

In the context of teaching, visual-aids are items that are designed (most by teachers) to support written or spoken information so that it can be understood more easily. They include graphs, images, black-board, white-board, charts, posters, physical models, maps, slides, and other objects that facilitate the processes of teaching and learning.

Why Use Visual-aids in the classroom?

Visual-aids have the ability to arouse and maintain students' interest, simplify teaching, accelerate learning and improve the retention of learned information. Theories that support the use of



visual-aids in the classroom emphasize the importance of two factors to learning:

1. Motivation

A student is motivated when he/she has a strong desire from within to learn; he or she makes an effort to learn more effectively.

2. Participation

Participation refers to learning by doing. The argument is that learning which is rooted in direct experience improves memory processes such as retention, recollection, and recognition. The experiences which are direct and first-hand experiences are the ones which are more likely to affect a student most deeply, and therefore be most completely learned.

Visual-aids bring the real thing closer to the student! They make learning experiences more natural more realistic. Learning is faster and therefore more effective when students are interested to learn when visual-aids make it easier for them to see patterns and relationships. Visual-aids make it easy for students to form mental images of abstract ideas.

Criteria for Constructing Visual-aids

Maraffa's (1953) criteria for constructing visual-aids highlight some important issues for use to consider when we construct visual-aids for our classrooms:

1. Sturdy

You need to make sure that the item is strong and is able to withstand the test of use in time. Make sure that it can be taken from one room to another without it falling into pieces. While strength is important, we also need to ensure that it is not heavy and cumbersome. Thus make sure that the visual-aid is also light weight to facilitate mobility and ease of use.

2. There is movement in the parts

The more learner senses we can engage and bring into learning, the greater will be the learning. This is the reason why motion pictures are better visual-aids than still images. For example, our students are learning less when we are just drawing a 'pie' on the blackboard and divided it up by drawing lines through it. They will learn more about fractions if you cut up a real pie and distribute the pieces to your students. You move one piece of the pie to one student as you say: *This is one-sixth of our pie that you are having!*

Movement is important as it stimulates interest and thinking. It also makes relationships clearer and concrete.

3. Student must be able to handle it (touch it, and work with it)

Physical action engages many senses. The target is to involve as many senses as possible in the learning process.

4. Large enough to be at a distance.

Students must be able to see it from the back. There is little value in using a visual-aid that students can't see! Make sure that important parts are also visible and obvious.

5. Accurate

The visual-aid must be an accurate representation of the phenomena that it represents. If you are not sure of the phenomena, you need to do further research.

6. Practical and inexpensive

A visual-aid should not incur costs too great for you or your school to meet. You need to construct it using materials that are inexpensive, and readily available.

7. Colourful and attractive

Students (and teachers) like a colourful classroom! Colour improves interest and motivation.

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