Steps Toward Selecting Instructional Strategies that Promote Academic Achievement

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*Think, pair, share* is a common teaching strategy used to elicit student knowledge about a particular concept or gauge the ideas students have around a particular issue in an effort to gather information from all of the students in the class. Before continuing to read this article, *Think* (and write down) all of the teaching strategies you are familiar with. If this were a class session and not an article, the next step would be to *Pair* with another student and discuss your lists, join forces and co-create a *Pair* list. The last step would be to *Share* your ideas with the rest of the class. This teaching strategy can be used to meet many objectives. It may be particularly useful during the first day of class of any course, seeing as it serves the double purpose of providing the instructor with a clearer picture of the handle, if any, the students have of the subject; and, as an opportunity to break the ice and set the tone for a more interactive, student-centered class.

The remainder of this article describes four steps instructors can use when planning a course. Bear in mind that mastery of subject is just one of the pre requisites for effective teaching. As an instructor you must strategize in terms of what goals and objectives you want your students to achieve, what teaching strategies may help your students attain them, and how you will assess that learning has occurred. You must also plan for flexibility. Every class has different dynamic and needs, an effective teacher will get to know the students and make adjustments to the objectives, teaching strategies, and assessments as necessary.

1. **Begin with objectives**

Before selecting appropriate teaching strategies, determine the learning objectives for the course. “A learning objective is an outcome statement that captures specifically what knowledge, skills, attitudes *learners should be able to exhibit* following instruction” (Teacher and Educational Development, 2005). Usually these statements begin with “The students will be able to” and are followed by an action. After you write the learning objectives, plan all of the teaching strategies, learning activities and assessments around them.
In the middle school science methods course I teach at Cleveland State University (EDM 317), one of our objectives is, “The students will be able to incorporate a range of assessment strategies (formative, summative, peer, and self) in a unit plan.” Formative assessment is used “to inform instruction and provide feedback to students on their learning”, this type of assessment is generally informal, such as ungraded pre-tests or class participation, and will help you realize whether you can move on or keep working on a topic depending on whether the students have understood or not. Summative assessment is used “to measure and document the extent to which students have achieved a learning target” (Keeley, 2008, p. 4). This is generally a more formal type of assessment that comes in the form of graded essays, quizzes or exams. Peer assessment is when students are asked to provide feedback to their peers on an assignment and self-assessment is when students assess their own work, both of these assessment types are more infrequent, but are just as necessary given that they allow students to evaluate their own and others’ weaknesses and strengths giving way to a more thoughtful learning process. It is important to use a wide array of assessment techniques in order to fairly judge the students’ knowledge.

2. Align your teaching strategies to the objectives

Once the objectives are written, you can focus on selecting teaching strategies and learning activities that will facilitate students meeting the objectives through the course.

For the EDM 317 class, the teaching strategies we use to teach students about assessment include:

1. Reflecting on the types of assessment students experience in the course (detailed in table 1),
2. Reading about a variety of assessment techniques and actively participating in class discussions related to the readings,
3. Presenting an assessment technique to the class,
4. Developing assessments in class with their peers
5. Participating in an online environment.
### Specific assessment in EDM 317

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Blackboard assignments where they interact with each other</th>
<th>Formative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Concept map</td>
<td>Summative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation of an assessment strategy</td>
<td>Formative and Peer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>Formative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop lesson plans</td>
<td>Formative and summative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer teaching</td>
<td>Summative and Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of a unit plan</td>
<td>Summative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 3. **Align your assessment strategy to the objectives**

After learning objectives are written and teaching strategies and activities are chosen, develop assessment strategies that evaluate the learning objective.

In EDM 317, the assessments of the objectives included:

- Presentation of an assessment strategy which includes peer assessment (formative)
- Reflection (formative)
- Develop lesson plans (formative and summative)
- Peer teaching (summative)
- Develop a unit plan (summative)

#### 4. **Make modifications to the teaching strategies and assessments as you get to know your students and their strengths**

The first three steps are effective only if the needs, knowledge, and experiences of the students in the class are considered throughout the class. It is necessary for college instructors to plan a course before getting to
know their students; however, this is contradictory to effective teaching literature, which advocates for pre-testing and planning based on the knowledge students bring to class. Instructors can pre-test and not distribute the syllabus the first day, but they also need to do pre-planning before the semester begins.

It is imperative as the semester proceeds to make notes and pay attention to what students are learning and experiencing and make necessary adjustments to the course schedule, activities, and assessments as necessary.

**Resources of Teaching Strategies:**

List of teaching strategies from George Mason University - [http://www.gmu.edu/resources/facstaff/part-time/strategy.html](http://www.gmu.edu/resources/facstaff/part-time/strategy.html)

Faculty Focus teaching strategies - [http://www.facultyfocus.com/tag/effective-teaching-strategies/](http://www.facultyfocus.com/tag/effective-teaching-strategies/)

Center for Research on Learning and Teaching, University of Michigan - [http://www.crlt.umich.edu/tstrategies/teachings.php](http://www.crlt.umich.edu/tstrategies/teachings.php)

**References:**


*Concept map* – "tools for organizing and representing knowledge" (Mintzes, Wandersee, ...