Keeping Current

Research-Based Ideas for Teachers from the Editors of *Better Teaching*®

Non-Lecture Teaching Strategies

Lecturing is the most common teaching method in most classrooms, and—used in combination with active learning strategies—is highly effective. Research shows students learn best when they are actively involved in learning. The following ideas suggest strategies that will keep your students interested and motivated to learn.

Peer tutoring

Class-wide peer tutoring is an effective and easy-to-implement strategy that provides students with another way to become actively involved in learning. Students learn to be both tutors and tutees.

When they act as *tutors*, they learn how to create learning opportunities, correct errors, give feedback and provide reinforcement. When they act as *tutees*, they learn different ways to practice and learn new concepts.

This technique allows students to work in pairs to cover a set amount of material. One student acts as the tutor for the first part of the lesson, then students switch roles. The materials they use might include worksheets, study guides or flash cards. As the students work, the teacher is free to monitor progress and provide feedback and assistance as needed.

Plan simulations

Simulations might best be described as replicas of real-world situations that are worth learning. Simulations allow students to use prior knowledge about a specific subject to solve problems that are related to that subject.

Simulations can be used as warm-up activities or to introduce a new unit of study. They can be used for team building or to create a high level of class participation.

Here are some questions that teachers should ask themselves when planning a simulation activity:

- **What is the instructional** objective?
- **What problem** or process does the simulation address?
- **Where in the content** should the simulation be placed?
- **How much class time** will the simulation require?

If simulations are new to you, begin with a brief activity that students can complete in one class period. As you gain experience, move on to more complex activities.

- **How many students** will be able to participate? Look for ideas that will involve all of your students.
- **Who will fill what role?** Consider the consequences of assigning students to various roles. Think about how you will assign high-status roles.
- **How will teams be developed?** What will you do to ensure that each team will have students of varied ability levels?
- **What will the debriefing include?**
- **What resources will you need** to provide for your students?

Project-based learning

Project-based learning can engage students at all levels of ability. Research shows that when students are given opportunities to pursue topics that interest them in ways that they choose, they will expend more effort. They will make connections among subject areas, retain what they have learned, and be able to apply what they have learned in real-world situations.

Here's a basic framework to use when planning for project-based instruction:

1. **Select the topic of study.** Discuss it with your students to determine what they already know. Help them develop the questions they will answer during the course of their investigation.
2. **Provide resources** and suggest ways your students might carry out their investigations.
3. **Arrange a final event** where students have the opportunity to share what they have discovered with others.

Add action to lectures

Plan periods where students can think, talk and write about the material you present. Here's how you might break it down:

- **Clarification pauses.** Break content into several mini-lectures of approximately 10 minutes each. At the end of each mini-lecture, give students a few minutes to review their notes with partners. Provide clarification as needed during this time.
- **Shared paragraphs.** At the end of your lecture, ask students to write a paragraph that summarizes, in their own words, the major concepts you covered. Then pair students with partners to talk about their paragraphs. Collect the paragraphs and review them to see just what students do or do not understand.
- **Application notes.** Pose several questions about the information you present. Ask students to select one of the questions and write a paragraph that discusses a real-world application of the material.
- **Study lecture.** Structure lesson content into short mini-lectures (10 to 15 minutes each). After each, organize small-group study sessions. (Provide study questions students can use as a guide.) Begin the next class with an additional review.
- **Guided lecture.** Plan your lecture to take about half the class period. Do not allow students to take notes during this time. Then provide a few minutes for students to write down everything they remember. Break them into small groups for discussion and review.

  This allows students to focus on the material you are presenting without being distracted by the need to take notes at the same time.
- **Fish bowl.** At the beginning of class, ask each student to write at least one question relating to the previous day's content on a 3" x 5" card. Deposit the questions in a container and draw one question at a time. Read the question and allow time for student responses and discussion.

Create a constructivist classroom

Rather than being the imparter of knowledge, the teacher is the guide in a constructivist classroom. In this situation, the teacher helps students make their own connections and construct their own knowledge. The teacher's focus is on directing and eliciting student thinking rather than on providing information.

Following are the basic components of a constructivist classroom:

- **Teachers move the thinking** to the students. Rather than dominating the discussion, teachers provide the focus that directs student attention.
- **Teachers ask the questions** that ignite the thinking. They identify the key ideas and ask open-ended questions designed to generate student discussion of those ideas.
- **Teachers use student comments** to elicit other student comments and build on the discussion.

Learning centers

Learning centers are another good way to move beyond lecture-based instruction. They allow students to engage in activities that can enrich, extend, practice, refine or remediate instruction. Here are a few key considerations when planning learning centers:

- **Who?** Which students will benefit from particular learning center experiences? How can students be grouped to maximize the benefits of collective interaction?
- **What?** What do you expect students to accomplish at each learning center?
- **Where?** Where will you locate the centers? Centers should be easily accessible and provide sufficient space for movement. They should be near any needed equipment, electrical outlets, etc. They should be located where they will not interrupt other students or be affected by other activities taking place in the classroom.
- **When?** What is the best time to introduce learning centers in the lesson? Research has shown that centers are least effective when used to introduce new material and when students have not had sufficient training in how to use them.
- **How?** There are many ways to construct learning centers and many reasons for using them. However, all centers should be organized in a clear, concise and user-friendly way. Purposes and directions should be clear. Any needed equipment and materials should be readily available.